



Virtual Public Involvement Initiative

Learn About

Digital Tools to Enhance In-Person Events



What are Digital Tools to Enhance In-Person Events?

For more than a decade, the prevalence of mobile devices have been rapidly growing; it has greatly changed the way the public shares and collects information. Using mobile devices and online tools during in-person meetings opens up new ways of communicating with the public.

In-person events and public meetings seek to bring people together to discuss important issues in their community and collect feedback that can influence the results of the planning and project development process. By introducing digital tools to these events, the experience is likely to be more engaging, fulfilling, and fun. Furthermore, agencies can use digital tools to gather more structured feedback and give citizens opportunities to lead their own meetings in their communities at times and places that work for them.

Some examples of integrating digital tools into in-person events include: live polling using mobile devices, facilitating the collection and sharing of ideas using tablets, and using social media to stream public meetings in real time in order to boost participation.



Image courtesy the Alamo Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (AAMPO)

VPI in Practice

The Alamo Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (AAMPO) uses live polling software to engage with the participants at public meetings to collect and display responses to questions in real time. Participants (both in person and remote) can easily access the polling tool on their mobile phones or computers and share their opinions about the topic at hand. AAMPO makes sure to have tablets available for those participants without access to a mobile phone. Tablets are also used to collect feedback from the public in the field.



Virtual Public Involvement Initiative

Digital Tools to Enhance In-Person Events



Can Digital Tools Enhance In-Person Events at My Agency?

Engaging with stakeholders during the transportation planning and project development process is not only required, 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.

Digital tools enhance in-person events and meetings by allowing the public to participate in the planning and project development process in more interactive and tangible ways. They are a great way to gather input from participants that do not typically share comments in front of an audience. For example, the Boston Transportation Department (BTD) purchased tablets for use by street teams when visiting neighborhoods to collect questions and ideas from the public during for its long range plan – Go Boston 2030. The engagement rate far exceeded the BTD's expectations.

A "Meeting-in-a-Box" is another popular tool for structuring and enhancing in-person events. Agencies develop meeting kits for community members to use at their own meetings at a time and location of their choosing. These kits contain all the materials and instructions to run a meeting and gather input, and often include tablets and links to online materials to help facilitate the process. The Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Association is one organization that has used meeting-in-a-box kits.

Live-polling software is another common tool that agencies use to enhance in-person events. These tools allow agencies to ask meeting participants questions and see results displayed in real time.



How Can My Agency Use Tools to Enhance In-Person Events?

For agencies interested in using digital tools for in-person events, there are different options depending on the resources available. For instance, purchasing tablets for use during events requires an up-front investment. Another option can be to encourage meeting participants to use their personal mobile devices. Not everyone will have access to a personal device, so agencies should set up stations (e.g., laptops, tablets) to ensure everyone has the ability to participate.

Agencies should continue to educate themselves on the latest technology and applications available, and consider ways to integrate digital tools into in-person meetings that meet their goals.

CONTACT A COLLEAGUE

Linda Alvareado-Vela
Planning/Public Involvement
Manager
Alamo Area MPO
(210) 230-6929
Alvarado-
vela@alamoareampo.org

Office of Planning, Environment, and Realty

TAKE NOTE...

- Digital tools can increase participation by allowing the public to use mobile devices to share input in real time
- Agencies can purchase tablets to use at in-person events, but also allow the public to use their personal devices
- Digital tools can allow community members to host their own meetings at a time and place of their choosing



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Highway
Administration**