



Virtual Public Involvement

A Collection of Tools, Techniques, and Examples



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Highway
Administration**

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Introduction

In 2011, the Federal Highway Administration launched the “Every Day Counts” program to help state departments of transportation, metropolitan planning organizations, and local public agencies advance practice-ready innovations into everyday use. Now in its fifth two-year cycle, the program is showcasing Virtual Public Involvement (VPI) as one of the featured innovations.

This initiative seeks to increase meaningful public involvement in transportation planning and project development by using a variety of virtual tools and techniques that make participation more convenient, affordable, and enjoyable for greater numbers of people.

This booklet includes information about VPI tools and techniques, organized into eight (8) categories. Each two-page fact sheet describes what the tool is, how the tool could help an agency improve its public involvement outcomes, and how interested agencies can get started.

The “Take Note” sections provide readers with quick reference about the tools. The work for numerous state, regional, and local agencies is included as examples throughout in the “VPI in Practice” sections.

Finally, each fact sheet includes information about how readers can contact a colleague who has knowledge of, and experience with, a particular tool or technique.

Look for the icons at right to help you navigate to the sections of each fact sheet that are most relevant to you and your agency.



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Virtual Public Involvement Initiative

Learn About

Mobile Applications



What are Mobile Applications?

Smartphones are more common than ever before, with some stakeholders relying exclusively on smartphones for internet access rather than tablets, laptops, or desktop computers. A 2017 study found that more than three-quarters of Americans reported owning and using a smartphone.*

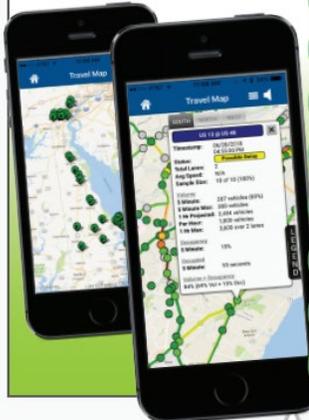
Mobile applications are closely related to – but very different from – their mobile-responsive website counterparts. With an app, users download and install the program directly on their smartphones. Apps allow users to obtain or review information, or submit their own text, images, or other multi-media messages.

Apps also usually feature on-screen notification options that serve to keep people engaged with, and aware of, updates from other users or from the app provider. In a transportation planning context, mobile apps can be developed as a single digital clearinghouse of information about project planning, development, public involvement opportunities, and contact information.

Mobile apps, by design, leverage geolocation services, which allows users to associate their comments with specific project locations, submit geotagged photos, or share location-based input.

DeIDOT App

The DeIDOT App provides up-to-the-minute, reliable traffic data that comes directly from DeIDOT's 24/7 Transportation Management Center (TMC).
Use the interactive travel map to view:



-  Real-time DART bus information
-  Live video from over 150 traffic cameras
-  Travel times for the heaviest-traveled roadways
-  24-hour real-time travel advisories (incidents)
-  Traffic flow
-  Roadway weather
-  Travel restrictions and closures
-  Snow plow movement during snow events
-  EV charging stations
-  Water levels on roadways

VPI in Practice

The Delaware Department of Transportation (DeIDOT) developed a mobile app for a range of activities, from sharing information about project planning and alerting stakeholders to upcoming public meetings to giving the public a way to report maintenance issues.

Image courtesy of Delaware Department of Transportation (DeIDOT)

Virtual Public Involvement Initiative Mobile Applications



Can Mobile Apps Help My Agency?

Mobile apps can reach more people than traditional media, especially in communities with high rates of smartphone use. Mobile apps can expand engagement by allowing users to submit or share geotagged photos, videos, and comments. Bolstering participation can make projects better, and make for a

smoother project delivery process.

Costs to develop mobile apps are typically invested up front, so longer term outreach costs can be reduced once stakeholders have downloaded and installed the app. Users can later be encouraged to take part in a range of public involvement activities outside of the mobile app setting, potentially growing the universe of stakeholders.



How Can My Agency Start Using Apps?

Agencies have a range of options when considering mobile apps. Some “all-in-one” community engagement software packages include customizable mobile apps in the suite of services. In other cases, like DelDOT’s app, an agency will develop a custom app.

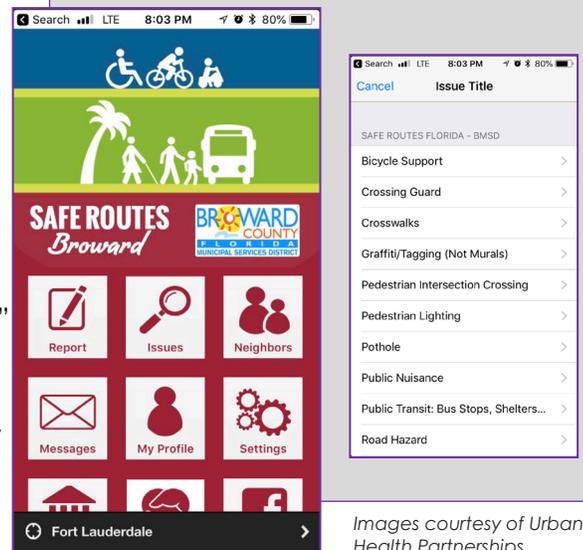
DelDOT created both iOS and Android versions of an app that assembles project information, event information, real-time traffic and weather alerts, and provides a way for drivers and system users to contact DelDOT when issues arise. The app interfaces with other popular traffic reporting apps as a way of keeping users engaged.

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VPI in Practice

Broward County Florida works with a non-profit - Urban Health Partnerships - to provide a mobile app that lets residents report issues they experience during walking, biking, and transit trips to and from school. The app uses GPS to tie comments and pictures to specific locations. Reports are routed to the appropriate department to be assessed and addressed. Users can track the status of their reports in the app and see what other users have identified as issues.



Images courtesy of Urban Health Partnerships

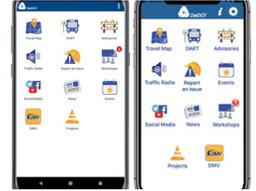
TAKE NOTE...

- **Smartphones are common among some stakeholder groups but not all**
- **A 2017 study* found 77% of U.S. adults say they own a smartphone**
- **Mobile apps put your information in stakeholders' pockets**
- **Mobile apps can leverage GPS-based location services to connect input with on-the-ground projects in real time**
- **Mobile apps may prime stakeholders for other kinds of engagement**

* Pew Research Center, “10 Facts About Smartphones as the iPhone Turns 10.” June 28, 2107.



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Virtual Public Involvement Initiative

Learn About

Project Visualizations



What are Project Visualizations?

Project visualization techniques include photo simulations, 3D images, videos, aerial footage, augmented reality or virtual reality. They can be powerful public involvement tools for transportation agencies because they provide the public with a “mock up” of what a proposed project would look like on the ground.

Visualizations can help communicate complex site conditions or engineering designs, enhance public understanding of a project’s goals, and provide spatial or geographic context for a project. What’s more, visualizations can be created before an agency spends time and resources developing detailed engineering plans and designs. Such visualizations can be a first step in conveying the macro or broad project objectives.

Transportation agency visualizations of plans and projects can be posted to streaming sites, shared on social media, and made accessible on project websites. Agency staff can integrate visualizations into do-it-yourself videos to share details of a proposed project, reaching potentially new audiences through a popular medium.



VPI in Practice

The Visual Engineering Resource Group at Washington State DOT develops visualizations to support the department’s project development and NEPA processes.

In this example, the team created a photo-simulation showing local terrain, existing buildings, and a proposed roundabout on SR150.



Virtual Public Involvement Initiative Project Visualizations



Can Project Visualizations Help 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.

A common challenge for stakeholders and the public is understanding how a project will actually impact the physical geography of their communities. Narrative descriptions of projects are valuable, but for many stakeholders, "a picture is worth a thousand words." Agency staff can dramatically improve the public's understanding of a project and its components by creating easy-to-access visualizations. Washington State DOT, which staffs an in-house Visual Engineering Resource Group dedicated to creating visualizations, reports that their open houses are becoming more popular, and participants display an enthusiastic appreciation for project visualizations.



How Can My Agency Create and Use Project Visualizations?

Creating visualizations requires specialized training and expertise in the use of key software packages and tools. Agencies may choose to assemble an entire team or provide adequate training and resources to one or two staff people or contractors. It's important to continually monitor and invest in staff development as tools, programs, and equipment will evolve and change over time. Agencies can test the value of visualizations to the public by hiring a firm to develop photo-simulations, animations, or videos before developing in-house staff capacity.

Washington State DOT had success by initially developing 3D modeling skills, then advancing to animations. Video software and the use of "storytelling" techniques can make for more compelling animations. An agency that has some basic equipment – video software, cameras, microphones, and lighting – is well positioned to begin using project visualizations in public involvement efforts.

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VPI in Practice

North Carolina DOT created 3-D visualizations for its "Complete 540" Triangle Expressway Southeast Extension project. Point your smartphone's camera at the QR code below to see the visualizations!



Image courtesy North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT)

TAKE NOTE...

- **Visualizations provide information that narrative or text doesn't convey**
- **Virtual reality – in the form of gaming – is already familiar among some demographics, like younger stakeholders**
- **Agencies can hire professional visual engineers or contractors prior to developing in-house staff capacity**
- **"A picture is worth a thousand words"**





Virtual Public Involvement Initiative

Learn About

Do-It-Yourself Videos



What are Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Videos?

Video content – whether viewed on television or on the web – reaches people in a very different way than written or published material. Video has been a mainstay of internet content for several decades.

Today's tablets, smartphones, and digital cameras make it easier than ever for individuals to create high-quality live or recorded videos. Features like image stabilization, drones, and other equipment have become ever more affordable and accessible to consumers, giving agency staff an alternative to hiring costly video production firms to create video messages.

Transportation agency videos about plans, projects, events, and more can be posted to streaming sites, shared on social media, and made accessible on project websites. By creating DIY videos, planners and program managers can create personalized, accessible content about a project to share with stakeholders, reaching potentially new audiences through a popular medium.



Utah DOT ✓
@UtahDOT

Follow

This weekend there will be a closure of the ramp from SB I-15 onto I-215 West. Get details on this project and more in this UDOT Construction Update. #Utah



5:26 PM - 2 Aug 2018

Image courtesy Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT)

VPI in Practice

Utah Department of Transportation [regularly creates short videos](#) using smartphones and easy-to-use digital cameras. UDOT uploads these videos to the web then shares them on social media. The videos are short, low-cost, and give stakeholders an opportunity to hear directly from agency staff about issues like project planning, construction activities, and upcoming public events and meetings.



Virtual Public Involvement Initiative

Do-It-Yourself Videos



Can DIY Videos Help My Agency?

Engaging with stakeholders during the transportation planning 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.

Video content can reach more people than other methods of engagement, especially in communities with high rates of internet use. Different stakeholder groups may also be more inclined to watch a short video on a smartphone or through a social media feed than to read a printed meeting announcement or text website content. Videos also have high engagement rates, meaning stakeholders may be more likely to share an agency's video than a flyer or an email.

Costs to develop DIY videos are largely associated with hardware and equipment. An agency that already has smartphones, digital cameras, or drones is well-positioned to use that equipment to create video content for stakeholders.



How Can My Agency Start Creating DIY Videos?

Agencies have a range of options for creating in-house video content. Simple, short, unscripted video messages can be easily created on a smartphone, then uploaded to a video site and shared via social media. If an agency prefers to use more advanced recording features, a staff person familiar with more sophisticated digital cameras can record footage and edit it using desktop video editing software.

Finally, an agency could invest in hardware like drones to capture video footage of project locations that are harder to reach on foot. Drone footage can be shared via social media or an agency website without any editing, or can be incorporated into longer videos with higher production value.

Utah DOT has experimented with different kinds of video content, from planned, scripted announcements to in-the-field recorded messages and project updates.

TAKE NOTE...

- **Video can engage viewers in a way print media can't**
- **Video creation hardware might already be in your pocket!**
- **Agencies can quickly and easily share video content on the web and through social media**
- **Videos can be closed-captioned or translated into various languages to reach even more stakeholders**

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Virtual Public Involvement Initiative

Learn About

Crowdsourcing



What is Crowdsourcing?

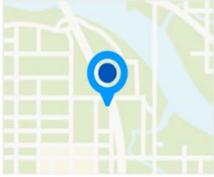
Public meetings and workshops are a traditional method of gathering information from a group of participants and facilitating conversation among those participants. Today, many stakeholders want to share their ideas and weigh in on ideas submitted by others in a digital format.

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.

Topics Join the discussion and add to current topics. [View All Topics](#)

Statewide Vision Posted Apr 25 6001 Interactions Topic is now closed



What is your vision to improve transportation in Connecticut?

Description

Imagine getting around in Connecticut in 10 or 20 years. What do you think should change over the course of time to make it easier to get from here to there?

Where applicable, please feel free to use the map to pinpoint the location of your ideas.

Ideas **546**
 Comments **605**
 Reviewed Ideas **4**

[See the 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)



Virtual Public Involvement Initiative

Crowdsourcing



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.

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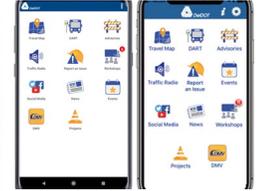
TAKE NOTE...

- 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



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Virtual Public Involvement Initiative

Learn About

Virtual Town Halls



What are Virtual Town Halls?

Public meetings are an essential part of the transportation planning and project development process. They provide a forum for stakeholders to learn about projects and investments, ask questions and interact with agency staff, and provide opinions and input on the local or regional transportation network.

With careful planning, face-to-face meetings can bring together diverse groups of stakeholders. They can elicit valuable feedback for staff and build support for transportation projects. However, public meetings require a great deal of time, labor, and funding to design, promote, and facilitate. What's more, stakeholders with busy schedules may find it burdensome to travel to a public meeting venue on a specific date and time.

Virtual town halls or virtual public meetings offer stakeholders a way to take part in the planning process without traveling to a meeting location, such as a school or conference center. Stakeholders may join the meeting via teleconference, or by using online meeting software they access from their own computers or from a computer available in public locations, like a local library. In some formats, attendees at virtual town halls can engage in live polling and other dynamic information-sharing, or listen to a simulcast in a language other than English.



SFMTA Online Budget Townhall

VPI in Practice

The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency used a virtual town hall meeting to discuss its FY 2019 and 2020 budget. The online meeting helped to improve participation and elicit useful feedback.

Image courtesy of San Francisco Municipal Transit Agency

Virtual Public Involvement Initiative

Virtual Town Halls



Can Virtual Town Halls Help 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 they have unique perspectives and insights about the places they live, work, and visit.

Virtual town halls can bridge the gap between wanting to attend an in-person public meeting and the constraints that stand in the way. Using virtual town halls can bolster participation, make projects better, and smooth the project delivery process.

Agencies can save time and money by employing readily-available approaches, like teleconferencing, and can reach populations with low-mobility, limited English proficiency, and other barriers that may reduce in-person attendance.



How Can My Agency Start Hosting Virtual Town Halls?

It's simple to get started hosting virtual town halls. Consider adding a teleconference option to an in-person meeting and sharing the toll-free call-in number in meeting advertisements. Some teleconference services provide technical support to manage calls with a large number of participants.

The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) recently opted to use online public meetings as a complement to traditional town halls for their budget process. The agency was in search of new avenues to increase engagement on

discussions related to the budget and was interested in leveraging existing resources to make meetings more accessible to the public.

The SFMTA was fortunate to be able to work alongside the production staff at San Francisco Government TV (SFGOVTV) in order to develop the content for the meeting and to produce a multi-cast approach as the meeting was broadcast on YouTube, SFGOVTV, and Facebook Live. Throughout the meeting, the agency accepted questions from participants in real-time through Facebook, Twitter and by e-mail. By offering various opportunities for engagement, the agency was able to gather feedback from a more diverse set of participants.

In preparation for the event, the agency promoted the online meeting using various social media channels and through its budget project web page, which offered a package of opportunities designed to generate feedback. In the future, SFMTA hopes to expand its online meetings offerings beyond discussions on the budget.

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TAKE NOTE...

- **Teleconferences and online meetings bring more people to the virtual table**
- **Virtual hearings may have legislative requirements**
- **Online town halls can be used to share graphics, maps, and other visual aids**
- **Virtual public hearings can save time and money while improving meeting effectiveness**





Virtual Public Involvement Initiative

Learn About

Mapping Tools



What are Mapping Tools?

As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. The same goes for maps. Maps provide an opportunity to share data in unique ways. They allow information to be communicated in a visual format, making it easier for the public to digest complicated data in a concise, clear format.

Beyond simply displaying information, mapping tools typically have interactive capabilities that permit users to search, click, and query their way across a specific project site, neighborhood, or region to gather details that may not be easily accessible in other formats. Some tools allow individuals to share comments or ideas directly on a map they can access from their mobile phones, tablets, or computers.

Integrating mapping tools into the planning and project development process can be a powerful way to communicate information and collect feedback and preferences from the public.

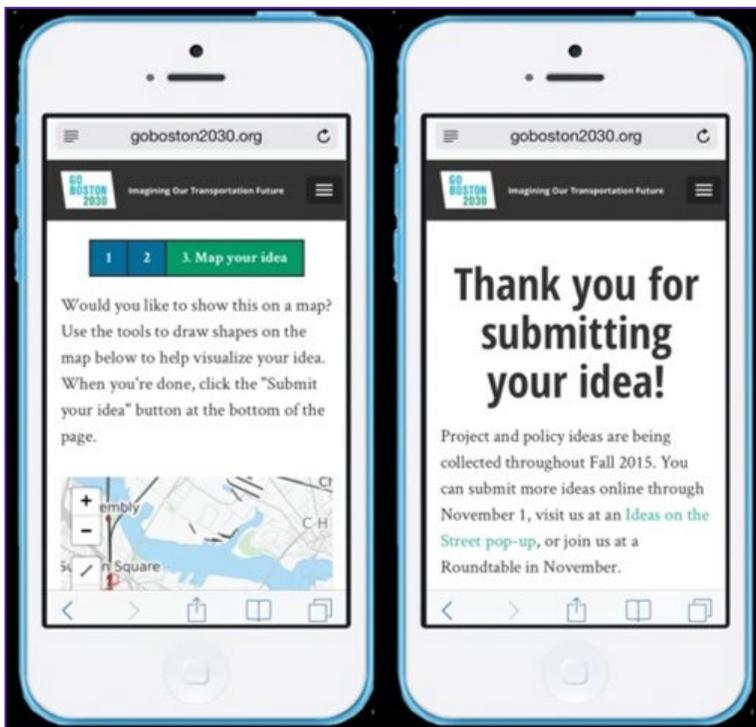


Image courtesy of Boston Transportation Department (BTD)

VPI in Practice

As part of its long-range transportation planning process, *Go Boston 2030*, the Boston Transportation Department (BTD) invested in a web tool that allowed users to share their ideas as either written concepts or by drawing lines or shapes directly on a map. The tool was optimized for both desktop and mobile browsers.



Virtual Public Involvement Initiative Mapping Tools



Can Mapping Tools Help 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 where they live,

work, and visit.

Mapping tools are an excellent way to show the public where funds are being spent or are expected to be spent. Agencies can embed maps directly into websites or mobile apps, giving the public the ability to search for information at their convenience. Thus, users can more easily digest information and understand where investments are being made.

Transportation agencies can also include options to submit comments, ideas, or questions. For example, when developing its Transportation Improvement Program, the Alamo Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (AAMPO) used an interactive map to show proposed projects and asked users to complete a survey to help prioritize projects for funding. AAMPO found that this approach increased participation by up to 500 percent.



How Can My Agency Start Using Mapping Tools?

Many options are available to integrate mapping tools into the planning and project development process. There are some free, user-friendly versions of mapping applications with simple data analysis and visualization capabilities that agencies can explore and pilot. Subscription-based mapping applications provide a greater range of services. For example, story maps allows agencies to combine maps with narratives, images, and videos.

VPI in Practice

During the Go Boston 2030 effort, BTS developed an online database that organized all ideas by zip code. Users were then able to go to BTS's website and click through an interactive map to review all submitted ideas. The public was able to express support for ideas by clicking "like." The results from this outreach effort directly influenced the four future scenarios BTS developed as part of its planning process.



Image courtesy of Boston Transportation Department (BTD)

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TAKE NOTE...

- **Maps can communicate data in unique and interesting ways**
- **Agencies may already have in-house, web-based mapping or GIS capabilities**
- **Agencies can share maps on their websites, through social media, and at in-person meetings and events**



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Virtual Public Involvement Initiative

Learn About “All-in-One” Tools



What are “All-in-One” Tools?

Several software companies have developed platforms that combine crowdsourcing features, mapping, visualization, file storage and sharing, and survey instruments. We call these platforms “all-in-one” virtual public involvement tools.

Today’s stakeholders access, consume, and create information in both digital and analog format. What’s more, many internet users are seeking a single clearinghouse of information about a topic or issue — a “one-stop shop” for information, maps, videos, and input submission areas.

Transportation agencies can use these “all-in-one” web-based platforms to consolidate plan drafts, videos, images, maps, event announcements, staff contact information, and more. Agencies can customize these all-in-one tools for specific transportation projects, or for medium- and long-range planning processes, such as NCDOT’s 2018-2027 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

VPI in Practice

North Carolina DOT first used MetroQuest as part of the public involvement process for its 2018-2027 STIP. The straightforward interactive site boosted public involvement by 19 times, allowing individuals across the state to easily get involved in the transportation planning and programming process.

Virtual Public Involvement Initiative

“All-in-One” Tools



Can “All-in-One” Tools Help My Agency?

Engaging with stakeholders during the transportation planning 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.

All-in-one tools can provide agency staff with a mechanism to dramatically increase public participation in a convenient and streamlined package. North Carolina DOT has used an all-in-one web-based platform for several plans and projects, and has seen increased participation among *all* stakeholder demographics. Notably, the agency also increased participation among stakeholders under 25 years of age and between the ages of 26 and 40. These stakeholders were historically underrepresented in the planning process.

Costs associated with all-in-one platforms are largely invested upfront in the form of software licenses and staff training. Once in use, agencies can see upticks in participation rates and decreases in outreach and public involvement costs. NCDOT reported a 600 percent decrease in cost per participant after making the investment in a web-based all-in-one tool.



How Can My Agency Start Using “All-in-One” Tools?

All-in-one tools are sophisticated, and agency staff may need to invest time in learning about a platform and pitching it to agency leadership. Acquiring licenses for these tools can be costly up-front, but increased overall participation can accelerate project delivery and reduce costs at later stages of the planning and project development process.

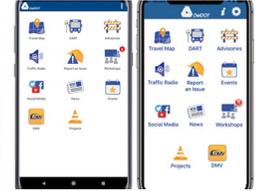
One useful approach is to find a peer agency or colleague in the field who is using an all-in-one tool. Start by gaining some hands-on experience with the information sharing, polling, mapping, and other features of a tool before making an investment. Software companies that produce these tools will also provide demos to equip agency staff with the knowledge they need to expand their virtual public involvement activities. NCDOT had success by looking both inward and outward: that is, identifying an internal staff person to serve as the main point of contact on implementation of an all-in-one tool and developing a strategic communications plan to promote use of the tool among the public and different stakeholder groups.



TAKE NOTE...

- **All-in-one tools require upfront investment and staff training**
- **Web-based platforms become “one-stop shops” for project information**
- **Agencies can dramatically improve participation rates and reduce costs**
- **Traditionally underrepresented stakeholder groups like younger community members can become engaged through all-in-one tools**





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.

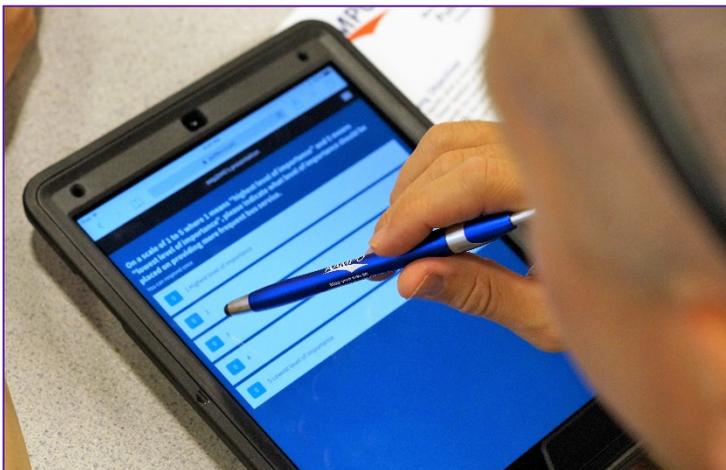


Image courtesy the Alamo Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (AAMPO)

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.

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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

Virtual Public Involvement
A Collection of Tools, Techniques, and Examples

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