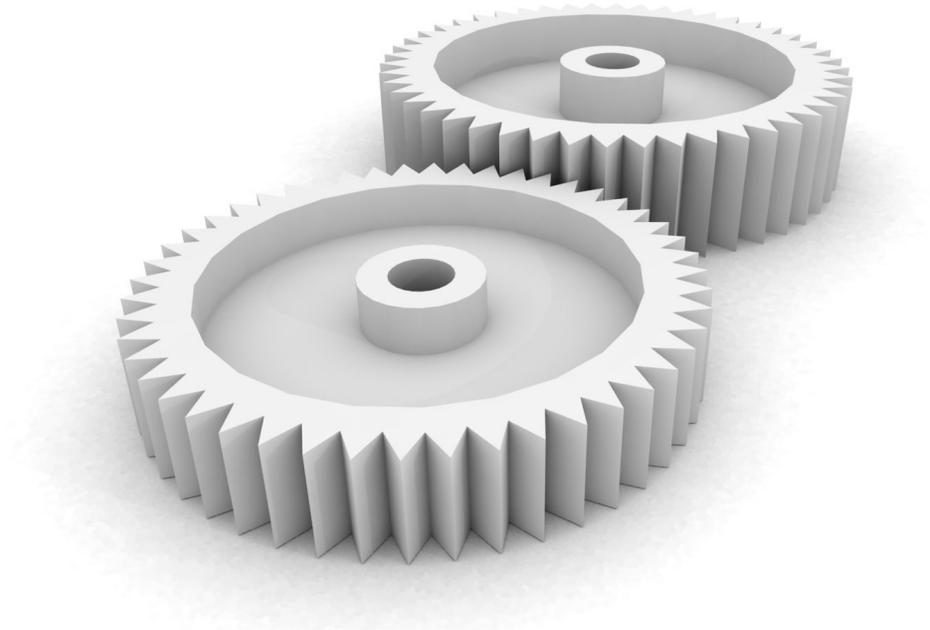


INVITING PUBLIC INPUT

TIPS



Surveys

- Web surveys are low cost and can provide a quick way to get comments on a proposal or more detailed assessment of attitudes
- Agencies can use web surveys to either precede or follow-up workshops and meetings
- Agencies can take steps to make the responses more representative of the community

Online Consultation and Idea Generation

- Hosted forum software can facilitate the process of obtaining ideas and input
- Many agencies leave the software on-line after the comment period has closed
- New approaches include mobile-friendly technologies plus budget games and simulations

The focus of this series so far has been on providing background information, holding and publicizing meetings, documenting the results of those meetings and obtaining participation through technologies related to these aspects of public engagement. For many public issues, this is not enough. An agency may want to get additional input and views on a proposed project, program or development. The good news is that there are tools and technologies which can help in getting more input.

About the Institute for Local Government

ILG is the nonprofit 501(c)(3) research and education affiliate of the League of California Cities and the California State Association of Counties. For more information and to access the Institute's resources on Public Engagement and technology visit www.ca-ilg.org/public-engagement-technology. To access this resource directly, go to www.ca-ilg.org/InvitingPublicInput.

- The Institute welcomes feedback on this resource:
- Email: info@ca-ilg.org Subject: Inviting Public Input
- Mail: 1400 K Street, Suite 205 • Sacramento, CA • 95814

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ONLINE SURVEYS

Many local agencies have hired survey research firms for the purposes of assessing resident satisfaction with services and to gain input on priorities for strategic planning and budgeting. Professionally administered surveys are also very helpful when weighing voter attitudes and opinions about potential ballot measures involving revenue measures and major projects in the community.

For some projects, another approach to get public input is to use less formal web or text-based survey tools. The advantage of these tools is that the content of the survey can be developed by any member of the agency staff because very limited technical knowledge is required to have a good interface for the public. Depending on the type of feedback desired, the survey can be just one or two questions, or involve more thoughtful preparation. The software cost is minimal (and in some cases free) and these surveys can be publicized on websites and social media. If it is a quick question, responses can be obtained in as little as 24 to 48 hours and even smaller cities and counties often receive hundreds of responses to such inquiries very quickly.

A web based survey will not have the demographically balanced sample of professional research and the results will need to be interpreted accordingly. But a staff-developed web-based survey can still be a very useful tool, especially keeping in mind the following best practices:

- Keep the survey short so that it takes just a few minutes.
- Include a few questions to know if there is a mix of residents (such as age, zip code and any other factors important to the topic).
- Pre-test the questions with a few community members to make sure they are clear and understandable.
- Announce the survey through multiple channels plus local media, and get community partners to put the link in their communications too.
- Monitor responses to see if the survey needs to be sent to specific sectors of the community to get more balance.
- Be careful about the timing of surveys; reporting closed-ended results creates specific expectations.

Web-based surveys can be a very helpful supplement to the agency's earlier meetings, workshops and outreach work. In some cases, if an agency has not reached a number of key stakeholders, a web based survey is an excellent next step before the outreach program is complete. Alternately, some agencies like to do the survey at the beginning of an outreach process to understand initial attitudes and perceptions and then move to more information –rich consultation tools to engage a more informed public.

ONLINE CONSULTATION, FORUMS & IDEA GENERATION

In the last couple of years there have been several vendors that have come on to the market with hosted discussion and idea generation products that start around \$1,500 in cost. These software programs can be linked to a city or county web site and allow the agency to post information and pose questions to the public about programs and proposals and obtain input – typically during a set time period.

The software enables the agency to easily capture responses and analyze statistics. In many cases, these forums remain available for viewing on the agency web site even after the comment period has ended. Examples of questions posed by cities and counties in California with these hosted products include:

- Issue Specific
 - What are your views on a proposed ordinance limiting smoking in specific areas?
 - What are key land use, transportation and economic issues?
- Quality of Life
 - How should the City celebrate the 4th of July?
 - How would you prioritize amenities for the downtown?
- Budget
 - How would you prioritize the Items in the 2014-15 Budget?
 - What do you think of the proposed parking fees for downtown garages?

NEW APPROACHES TO IDEA GENERATION & BUDGET DISCUSSIONS

There are also some interesting new approaches to generating ideas and making citizen input easier. Multiple vendors are focusing on the increasing use of smartphones and tablets with a mobile friendly citizen input tool. Software allows questions to be pushed directly to the devices of residents that sign-up for surveys and then facilitates a direct reply on these devices, eliminating the need to visit the agency web site.

Another approach involves the use of budget simulations and games to obtain citizen input and ideas. These products follow models initially available to allow citizens to comment on the state and federal budgets and solve these budget deficits by moving program elements up, down or out of the proposed budget. Comparable tools, simulations and games are now available for licensing and use by cities and counties in budget outreach work.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Online Forums & Input Articles

El Cerrito Uses Web Site Software to Create Community Voice Feature

<http://www.ca-ilg.org/public-engagement-case-story/city-el-cerrito-engages-residents-five-year-strategic-planning-process>

San Jose Invites Citizen Input on Prioritizing City Services Using Budget Game

<http://www.cafwd.org/reporting/entry/san-jose-invites-citizen-input-on-prioritizing-city-services>

Agency Web Sites – Online Forums & Input

City of Fremont

http://www.fremont.gov/index.aspx?NID=1623&pd_url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.peakdemocracy.com%2Fportals%2F118%2F1217

City of Los Angeles

<http://ideas.la2b.org/>

City of Oakland

<http://www.engageoakland.com/>

City of Palo Alto

http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/gov/topics/open_city_hall.asp?pd_url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.peakdemocracy.com%2Fportals%2F5%2F902

City of Rancho Cordova

http://www.cityofranchocordova.org/Index.aspx?page=732&pd_url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.peakdemocracy.com%2Fportals%2F141%2F1379

City of Sacramento

<http://www.envisionsacramento.com/>

City & County of San Francisco

<http://www.improvesf.com/>

City of San Ramon

http://www.sanramon.ca.gov/opensr/?pd_url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.peakdemocracy.com%2Fportals%2F117%2F1013

City of Sausalito

<http://www.peakdemocracy.com/portals/136/1349>

City of Vallejo

http://www.ci.vallejo.ca.us/living/open_city_hall?pd_url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.peakdemocracy.com%2Fportals%2F109%2F947

City of Walnut Creek

http://www.walnut-creek.org/citygov/opentownhall.asp?pd_url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.peakdemocracy.com%2Fportals%2F125%2F1233

City of Yucca Valley

http://www.yucca-valley.org/departments/gpu_forum.html?pd_url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.peakdemocracy.com%2Fportals%2F107%2F917

Humboldt County

http://co.humboldt.ca.us/openhumboldt/?pd_url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.peakdemocracy.com%2Fportals%2F131%2F1189

Marin County

http://www.marincounty.org/openmarin?pd_url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.peakdemocracy.com%2Fportals%2F71%2F1202

Santa Cruz County

http://www.sccoplanning.com/PlanningHome/LongRangePlanning/ClimateActionStrategy/OpenTownHall.aspx?pd_url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.peakdemocracy.com%2Fportals%2F110%2F926