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# DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT BEST PRACTICES

TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES FOR CITY  
LEADERS, PLANNERS, ENGINEERS,  
ARCHITECTS AND DMOS.

CivicBrand 



At CivicBrand, we believe that meaningful stakeholder engagement is critical across a wide range of projects, from city branding to planning projects. Engagement is vital to the outcome, buy-in and success of a project and — to be blunt — just holding a public meeting or two doesn't cut it.

In these times of required social distancing, many are only now starting to look at solutions for digital engagement, as they are no longer allowed to hold public meetings or workshops. But at CivicBrand digital engagement has been at the forefront of our approach for years.

Public engagement is about reaching the entire community, not just those who are available to attend meetings. Some people have young children at home, are busy working, or simply don't feel like attending a meeting. That is no excuse to not provide a range of engagement options that work for diverse audiences — on their terms. For our projects, we use a range of 3rd party engagement tools and have also developed a suite of custom digital engagement tools that go far beyond just your typical online survey. This includes easily accessible, on-brand, and even fun interactive engagement tools such as virtual workshops with online mapping pin drop tools, interactive priority and preference tests, whiteboard exercises and more.





There are many things to consider before you dive into digital engagement tools. The last thing you want to do is play IT for hundreds of frustrated stakeholders. Additionally, putting all of your eggs in one basket with a single cutting edge digital tool is no better than doing a single public meeting. It's just as inaccessible, only now you're alienating a different audience. Digital engagement should be a powerful tool in your engagement toolbox, but you still have to have a diverse engagement strategy — even in times of social distancing.

**The following tips and best practices are a great place to start for those who are just getting into utilizing digital engagement tools.**



**MOBILE FIRST**

Not only is the user experience of something better when designed for mobile first, but you'll also be able to reach the widest number of people. Pretty much everyone has a phone. Not everyone has a laptop or desktop computer.



**KEEP IT SIMPLE**

Don't try to put out something too complex or tricked up. Focus on keeping your digital engagement platforms simple and easy to use for all demographics.



**AVOID SOFTWARE DOWNLOADS OR ACCOUNT CREATION**

Digital engagement should be seamless and have a low barrier to entry. Your stakeholders should be able to access your platform from any device without having to download software or create an account.



### **STAY DIVERSE, EVEN NOW**

A single digital event is no better than a single public meeting. You need to offer a range of engagement opportunities and, most importantly, offer them on days and times that the public is available to engage. Maybe this means you have an online survey, but also a printable PDF that can be mailed to you, pick up and drop off options, phone interview time slots, etc.



### **OFFER A BAIL OUT**

Always offer another option if your chosen platform is not working for someone. You could have a live chat feature, downloadable version of the activity, or even mail them a survey worksheet. You don't want people to get frustrated and not participate.



### **EACH QUESTION YOU ASK LOWERS CONVERSIONS**

We know it can be tempting to ask a ton of questions. Data is critical, and it is often very valuable to be able to slice and dice that data by various demographic questions or qualifiers. However, keep in mind every question you ask is another hurdle for the user to overcome, and each hurdle lowers your conversion rates. If the data is valuable enough to warrant less submissions, then ask for it. But if you want more submission, consider dropping that field or question.



### **BRAND & MESSAGE CONTROL**

At CivicBrand, the reason we began developing custom digital engagement tools was because many 3rd party tools were only great if the way you wanted to ask a question was exactly like the way they designed their tool to ask it. This meant we had to tailor our questions and strategy to the tool. However, we believe the tool should adjust to your strategy. Additionally, we're big believers in the importance of branding — not being able to 100% control the layout, look-and-feel, and domain is a dealbreaker for us. Your brand is your most valuable asset, therefore you need to protect it. Digital engagement that is frankensteined across numerous platforms and URLs with different looks is confusing for the user and bad for your brand.

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