



# Public Engagement Report

January 2022

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# Introduction

Public engagement can be defined as helping the general population become more informed about, and influence, public decisions. Similarly, civic engagement can be defined as helping different communities become more involved in political or municipal affairs. Both are at the heart of this report.

Public and civic engagement have transformed greatly over the last two decades, as new communications technologies have made it easier than ever before to understand and participate in local government. In particular, the invention of the internet and proliferation of mobile phones has forced governments around the world to adapt and innovate new ways to exchange ideas with local citizens.

While private sector services are undergoing a revolution in personalization and hyper-localization thanks to these new technologies, the public sector response has been limited by comparison. However, this is beginning to change: governments are now adapting with great creativity, from establishing city-centric think tanks to mimicking tech applications like Tinder.

This report details 10 case studies from 9 different countries. Each case study is unique in its approach to public or civic engagement, and each has found local or global success. While the Iceland case highlights the use of an innovative platform to gain insight into citizen preferences, the Finnish Participation Board Game emphasizes the

importance of government employee engagement in policymaking. Furthermore, the Committee for Melbourne case covers how business, academia and non-profit sector can be engaged for to develop innovative solutions to enhance city livability. better policies and solutions to challenges facing governments. Through the cases from Taiwan and Belgium, the report also sheds light on the use of technology in crowdsourcing initiatives employed by governments to gather and citizen feedback. On the other hand, the Portugal case outlines how traditional (non-digital) engagement methods also continue to be useful for citizen engagement. The hope for this report is to inspire readers with new ideas to enhance public and civic engagement in their own countries and hometowns.







# 1

## Iceland's Better Reykjavik Program: Over half of city's residents steer policymaking

Icelandic citizens are having their say by suggesting policies through Better Reykjavik, an online, open-source platform used by over 56% of the city's population. Initial suggestions are shortlisted by city council members before being published for a public vote. Approximately \$17.5m has been spent over 787 citizen-suggested policies since the site's inception.

There are no qualifying or disqualifying factors for participants on the Better Reykjavik platform and the integration of social media accounts allows users to sign-up with a verified Facebook or Twitter profile. The website is open for everyone to view and participate without registration. However, unregistered users can not cooperate with the administration about ideas or projects going forward as they do not leave contact information. Participation in the more localized "My Neighbourhood" vote is more restrictive, requiring users to obtain verification by the Icelandic National Voter Registry.

Better Reykjavik counts over 70,000 users past and present, more than half of the city's population. Policies including more trips for schoolchildren and better support for the homeless have since become law. To date, over 16,000 registered users have submitted over 5,800 ideas and 12,000 points for and against these ideas, while over 1,000 ideas have been formally reviewed in 2020, around 10-15 top priorities are considered by Reykjavik City Council and voted on each month.

"Your Priorities", an online platform engineered by the Icelandic Citizens Foundation, a non-profit dedicated to developing digital strategies for citizen engagement, allows citizens to propose policies which are then debated on the online forum. Policies are critiqued, voted up or down, and submitted to city councilors. Using the online platform, individuals, groups, and governments can create their own participatory web portals with various sub-forums called 'communities'. Unique to the platform is the ability to both propose ideas and deliberate on other proposals. According to developers, the application is an avenue for large groups to speak with one voice and organize ideas. People are able to see the most popular points of view on the topic.

Within the platform, specific sections are created to deal with longer-term projects - for example, Iceland's education policy has its own space on the site with regular engagement from users. This was the first time a policy of any government within Iceland was crowdsourced. The process was concluded successfully in 2018 when the education policy was published.

A similar process is now ongoing in which the city is formulating its first democracy policy and asking the citizens to participate by submitting their ideas on improved processes and/or prioritizing democracy objectives.



One key hurdle to overcome was ensuring citizen engagement. Iceland has strong traditions of online democratic engagement and the highest levels of internet use in the EU. Some 96% of Icelandic households use broadband and, currently, 81% of citizens had used e-government sites. Countries with less digitally understanding or active electorates might not experience the same uptake.

The program has done much to repair the city's confidence in its elected politicians following the financial crisis, which saw all three of Iceland's largest privately-owned banks default at the end of the year.

The platform was adopted by The Best Party, an anti-political party which ran without a policy platform in protest against what they deemed the corruption of the political system.

The website is non-partisan in nature, but The Best Party within Iceland was the first to see its potential. When The Best Party won some 36% of the vote and entered into coalition with the Social Democratic Party, Better Reykjavik became a vital tool in determining coalition policy.

As the elected members have developed their use of the system, the quality of their responses to the public has improved. Any

vague or non-committal answers were rejected by the online community, and the strict character limit helped to ensure that answers were kept clear and concise.

The program is extremely popular and is being adopted by other countries now. A platform using the same open-source software in Estonia, called Rahvakogu, has seen seven policy suggestions become law, including tougher sanctions on political figures accepting illicit donations and lower participation thresholds for the founding of new political parties. Smaller-scale uses of the technology have also been used in the United Kingdom, North Carolina in the United States, and the Balkans.

Iceland's politicians reject the idea that the program's success is due to any unique characteristic of Iceland's political culture, although they note that participation platforms might work better in small states.





## 2

### Finland's Participation Board Game: Gamification to Understand Government

When mayors talk about “citizen engagement,” two things usually seem clear: It’s a good thing and we need more of it. But defining exactly what citizen engagement means – and how city workers should do it – can be a lot harder than it sounds.

To make the concept real, Finland’s capital city of Helsinki has come up with a creative solution. City leaders made a board game that small teams of managers and front-line staff can play together. As they do so, they learn about dozens of methods for involving citizens in their work, from public meetings to focus groups to participatory budgeting.

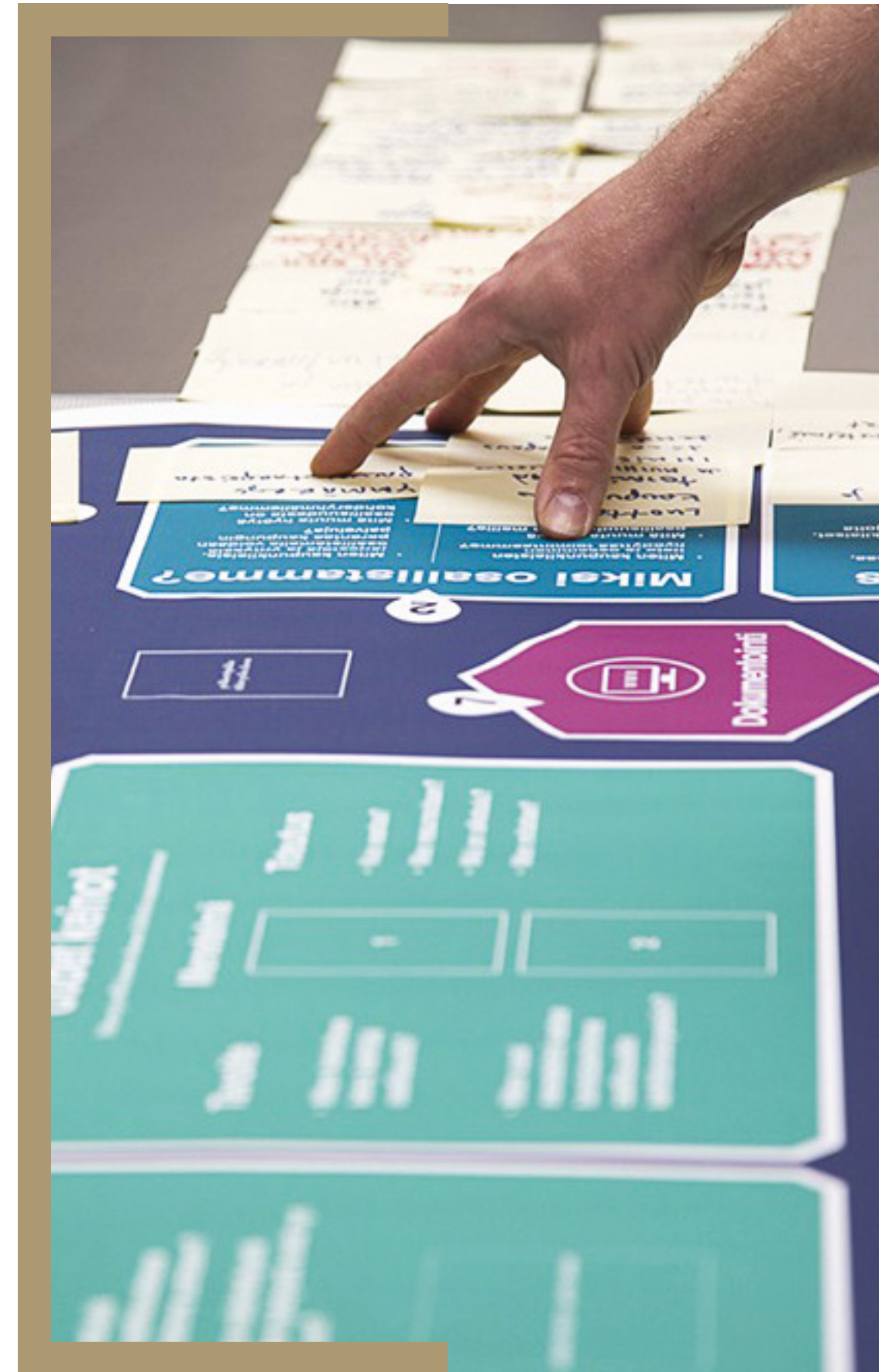
It’s called the “Participation Game,” and over the past year, more than 2,000 Helsinki employees from all city departments have played it close to 250 times. According to the Division of Culture and Leisure in Helsinki, the game has been a surprise hit with employees because it helps cut through jargon and put public participation in concrete terms they can easily relate to.

Citizen engagement is an elusive phrase that means different things to different people. For some, the phrase might mean involving citizens in a co-design process while for others, it might mean answering feedback by email. The different meanings indicate a difference in ambition between those approaches to citizen engagement.

The game’s rollout comes as Helsinki is overhauling local governance with a goal of making City Hall more responsive to the public. Starting June 2020, more power is vested in local political leaders, including the mayor, Jan Vapaavuori. More than 30 individual city departments are now consolidated into four. And there’s a deep new focus on involving citizens in decision making. That’s where the board game comes in.

Helsinki’s experiment is part of a wider movement both in and out of government to “gamify” workforce training, service delivery, and more. The idea to use a board game is not about creating winners or losers, but rather to provide structure for a team meeting that sparks new ideas, collaboration, and learning. The Helsinki design firm Hellon crafted the game board and pieces in a co-creation process with about 100 city employees who tested several iterations of the game before settling on a final version.

To play the game, teams of 7 to 30 people huddle around the canvas game board with sticky notes and pens. With the help of a trained facilitator – usually a city employee who doesn’t know the participants – the group picks a concrete issue they are working on that needs more input from citizens. Then the game moves through a series of stages intended to get a dialogue going about why participation matters.



About halfway through the game, a deck of 200 cards is introduced. Printed on each card is a participation tool the city of Helsinki has used in the past – hosting resident meetings at City Hall, opening city datasets for public use, or allowing public uses in city-owned spaces, for example. Working in pairs, the group identifies tools they have used and places those cards on the board. The cards help a lot by infusing the conversation with real-world examples of participatory tools. The game is structured to surface ideas even from shy or quiet participants, adding to the sense of shared ownership at the end.

Later in the game, the group identifies what they can improve upon in their current engagement efforts. Then they

look through the card decks to identify new methods to try. The full game takes about one and a half hours. It encourages players to find their own way to put participation in practice. The game presents participation as a collective responsibility of a team rather than a singular action that needs to be done to tick the box.

Soon, employees in other cities may be playing the game, as well. Finland's association of municipalities is planning to make the game available for smaller cities. The game is free for any city around the world to use as well, but it cannot simply be copy-and-pasted into another organization because it's context specific to Helsinki.



# 3

## Los Angeles's Online Business Portal: Slashing Red Tape for Local Entrepreneurs

The LA Innovation Team designed a sleek and accessible online business portal that greatly simplified the process of starting a business in the city. It was built after consultation with local entrepreneurs and the government agencies they interact with, and aimed to cut the average time required to set up a business from six days to one. It was originally set up with a \$250,000 grant from the federal government. Over its first 10 months, the new online portal attracted over 60,000 unique users. Several other US cities (including Minneapolis and Nashville) are now in the process of using the online portal as a template to build their own portals.

The LA Innovation Team spent a great deal of time in discussion with businesses to ask what they wanted to see from the city. The conclusions drawn from these discussions was people want resources that make it clearer how to do business in LA.

The LA Innovation Team was in discussion with many local business owners to understand the experience of setting up a business. They then discussed with the relevant government agencies involved at the city, county, state and federal levels of government to figure out how the process of communicating with them and applying for permits could be simplified. The design of the portal was inspired by these

consultations. The innovation team noted that communicating the idea of the portal to government agencies and prospective users was also a challenge during the process.

The portal has four sections providing advice on how to plan, start, manage and grow a business. When users visit the portal for the first time, they are asked a series of straightforward questions about their venture. They then receive a roadmap directing them through the entire startup process, from location scouting to acquiring permits and accessing capital. Another function of the platform is business-to-business communication: it encourages owners of similar businesses to share their experiences and knowledge.

The portal looks different from other city websites because it is user-friendly. As the objective was for users to have a pleasant experience, the portal uses bright colours, iconography, and a consistent brand throughout the site. Additionally, local businesses are highlighted through photos of them appearing as the portal is navigated.

In keeping with the many languages spoken in LA, of which Spanish is the most prominent, the site has been translated to Spanish. Careful attention was paid to





the complexity of the language. Initially, the language was at 12th-grade level, but after user testing, it was changed to be understandable for a 7th-grader. This was done to ensure the content was written in an accessible way so all users are able to understand complicated city rules.

When users first visit the portal they answer a series of simple questions about their venture, and are then given a bespoke roadmap that guides them through the whole startup process. This takes them through, among other things,

location scouting, license permitting and accessing capital. The site's features, such as the "Start Up Guide," can quickly map out how to register new businesses and be compliant with city rules, while other features share information on growth and management. The easy-to-navigate resource finder details what roles each City Department has for businesses.



# 4

## Australia's Committee for Melbourne: a City-Focused Think Tank

The Committee for Melbourne is a non-profit organisation based in Melbourne, Australia. The Committee was founded to bring together businesses, academia and non-profit organisations for activities, networking, and policy advice for the government. Its membership includes over 150 different organizations. Its aim is to keep Melbourne as one of the world's most liveable cities. It is an independent organisation that represents no single interest group or political position, but seeks to challenge conventional thinking and to develop innovative ideas to continue to enhance the city as an economically prosperous and highly liveable global destination. The Committee is governed by a 14 member board that meets six times a year at a neutral location, to provide a neutral space for interaction between various stakeholders.

While it considers itself a think tank, the Committee operates more like a lobbying organization, and tries to stay above local politics by having members from every employment and socioeconomic background. Therefore like other lobbying organizations, it pushes its optimistic agenda for the city's future through events, advocacy, and training workshops, and relies heavily on its extensive network. In other cities or countries, the work of the Committee for Melbourne might be accomplished by multiple groups, like a teacher's union, a trade council, and other semi-formal networks of organizations. Melbourne has those other resources too, but the Committee for Melbourne is able

to exert a stronger influence because it has so many different organizations as a part of it. On the other hand, its agenda is very middle ground and lacks an experimental aspect, likely due to the difficulty of reaching a more radical policy consensus with such broad membership. But when there is consensus on a more startup-like idea that needs to be nurtured, the Committee can act like an incubator to test it and prepare for it scrutiny with other major stakeholders.

The outcomes of the Committee for Melbourne come in three categories: private sector collaboration, establishing organizations, and shaping government policy; its topical work embraces four key pillars: Future Economy, Infrastructure, Urban Optimisation, and Liveability. The expertise of its diverse membership from across Greater Melbourne's major corporations, small and medium businesses, academic institutions, local government and not-for-profit entities, informs their input into policy and advocacy positions.

The Committee has been a major driving force behind the development and progression of many major city projects over the years, such as the Docklands redevelopment, privatization of Melbourne Airport, progressing medical technology through the BioMelbourne Network, and the Western Bypass and CityLink projects. Most recently, the Committee outlined best practice principles for an independent infrastructure prioritisation entity, which were adopted by Infrastructure Victoria.



Central to the Committee for Melbourne are its many events, which foster dialogue and connections between government, senior business leaders, and influential citizens, generating ideas that shape strategies for Melbourne's future success. Many of these events are simply bringing together relevant partners to draft new policy solutions. By keeping corporate, academic, public sector, and other stakeholders in the same meetings, the city's social capital and sense of community is heightened.

Also key are the Committee's advocacy efforts. They collaboratively encourage debate and inform government policy to make the city a better place and meet tomorrow's challenges today, informing policy development in government by producing a substantial body of fact-based and credible research. The Committee's advocacy principles include:

- Their Secretariat works with members to research issues and develop official Committee viewpoints. The Secretariat is expected to remain free of any conflicts of interest.
- They do not advocate for individual members' issues, rather they speak about important issues on behalf of all Committee members for the good of Melbourne

Another key program is the Future Focus Group, which helps train emerging city leaders into skilled, committed and connected civic leaders who have an enduring positive impact on Melbourne. The Committee sees fostering strong leadership as crucial for keeping Melbourne globally competitive for creativity and knowledge. The Program runs over 15 months, and has over 400 graduates to date. The Future Focus Group is a unique offering for selected emerging leaders in Melbourne to better understand, connect within and contribute to Melbourne while building their leadership capabilities, as well as an outstanding opportunity to make real and enduring contributions to city policies and projects. Now in its third decade, the program features an induction event, 15 evening workshops, and active one-on-one mentoring.

Lastly, the Committee is heavily involved with the city's infrastructure development, making sure it is as advanced and sustainable as possible in order to enhance the city as a platform for innovation.





# 5

## vTaiwan: Crowdsourcing Laws

Recently, The Taiwan's finance ministry had decided to legalize online sales of alcohol. When government officials struggled to come up with regulations to make it more difficult for children to abuse the new online system, they turned to a new crowdsourcing tool for help.

A group of government officials and activists decided to take the question to a new online discussion platform called vTaiwan. In 2016, about 450 citizens went to vtaiwan proposed solutions, and voted on them.

Within a matter of weeks, they had developed a set of recommendations. Online alcohol sales would be limited to a handful of ecommerce platforms and distributors; transactions would be by credit card only; and purchases would be collected at convenience stores, making it nearly impossible for a child to secretly get hold of alcohol. By late April 2016, the government had incorporated the suggestions into a draft bill that it sent to parliament.

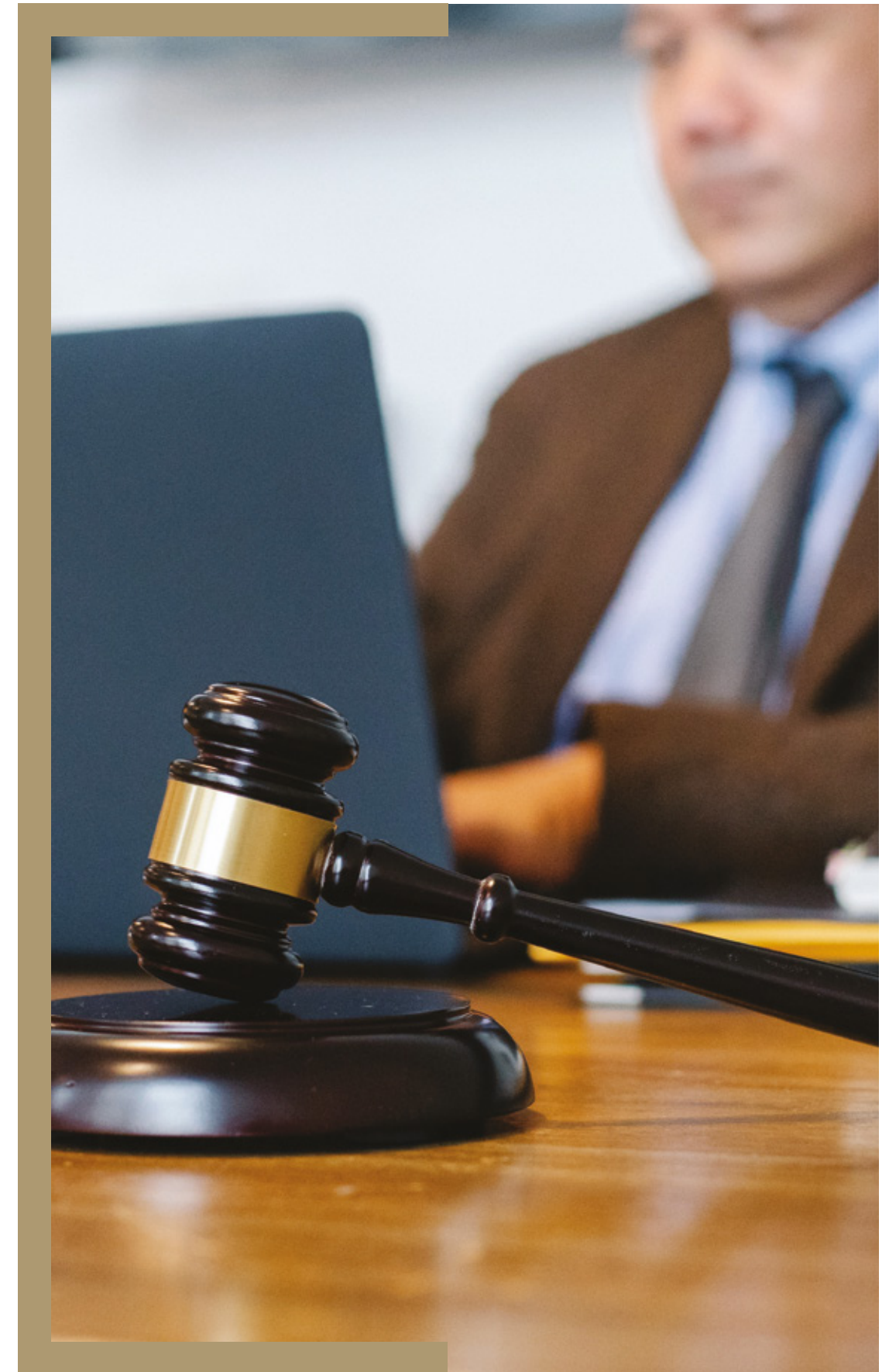
Why was it able to reach a consensus so quickly? The opposing sides had never had a chance to interact with each other previously. When they did, it became apparent that both sides were basically willing to give the opposing side what it wanted, and regulations were quickly written up.

Three years after its founding Specifically in 2019, vTaiwan has been used to debate a couple of dozen bills, but the government

isn't required to follow the outcomes of those debates. This is perhaps the system's biggest shortcoming. But the system has proved useful in finding consensus on deadlocked issues such as the alcohol sales law, and its methods are now being applied to a larger consultation platform that's being tried out in some local government settings. The question now is whether it can be used to settle bigger policy questions at a national level – and whether it could be a model for other countries.

vTaiwan relies on a hodgepodge of open-source tools for collecting policy proposals, sharing information, and holding polls, but one of the key parts is Pol.is, a digital platform providing the backbone of vTaiwan behind the scenes. On Pol.is, a topic is chosen to be put up for debate. Anyone who creates an account can post comments on the topic, and can also upvote or downvote other people's comments.

Two particular aspects of Pol. make it unique. The first is that you cannot reply to comments. Developers say it drastically reduces the motivation for trolls to disrupt the debate. The second thing is that it uses the upvotes and downvotes to generate a kind of map of all the participants in the debate, clustering together people who have voted similarly. Although there may be hundreds or thousands of separate comments, like-minded groups rapidly emerge in this voting map, showing where there are divides and where there is consensus. People then naturally try to draft comments that will win votes from both sides of a divide, gradually eliminating



the gaps. The visualization is very helpful for understanding how citizens understand an issue, and helps reduce intentionally divisive comments.

The process itself is designed to facilitate constructive conversation through several stages, including an initial 'objective' stage for crowdsourcing facts and evidence, and a 'reflective' stage using Pol.is, which encourages the formation of 'rough consensus'. Finally, key stakeholders are invited to a live-streamed, face-to-face meeting to draw up specific recommendations.

At this meeting, expert stakeholders, including government departments, are asked to provide their own official statements and to publish any raw facts or data related to the topic. These statements are then published on Slideshare on the vTaiwan website under a strict criteria of accessible language and readability. Forum comments, survey data, videos, discussions throughout the consultation, even in preparatory meetings, are also made publicly available, and where possible, transcribed and published as structured, searchable data.

By turning the entire process of consultation into publicly accessible audit-trail of information, anyone can go back and see exactly where a particular decision was made and on what facts or opinions it was based, in turn helping outsiders to gain more trust in the process. It also

improves collective awareness and makes conversations more productive. For example, facilitators may point to where a conversation or debate has already been resolved in an earlier point in the consultation, in order to avoid duplication or wasted time discussing similar issues more than once.

As of August 2018, vTaiwan had been used in 26 cases, with 80% resulting in decisive government action. In addition to inspiring regulations for Uber and online alcohol sales, it has led to an act that creates a fintech sandbox, or a space for small-scale technological experiments within Taiwan's otherwise tightly regulated financial system.

The consensus-building tendencies of vTaiwan can lead discussions in unexpected directions. Initially, opinion on caning as a punishment was divided into three camps: besides the people who were for and against caning, a third group argued that it was too light a punishment for such offenses. Eventually, however, the consensus opinions that emerged had nothing to do with caning at all, but were more focused on methods of preventing those crimes. Proposals eventually considered for legislation included alcohol locks and confiscating drunk drivers' cars. That kind of realization, and solution, wouldn't have emerged from a traditional online petition that only gives people the option of voting yes or no.





# 6

## Canada's Calgary Tiger Team:

Tiger Team is a “super team” with over 25 leading business people who meet monthly to tackle problems in the administration and city of Calgary in Western Canada. This collaborative experiment brings a diverse mix of stakeholders together for 2.5 hours to understand and explore complex problems, generate ideas, and prototype solutions to test with users. They refer to this setup as a “think tank environment”. By bringing together these diverse perspectives Tiger Team is able to compress timelines, find unexpected solutions, identify change makers, and break down silos.

Recently, a partnership with The City of Calgary's Innovation Lab to co-design Tiger Team. 20 to 25 members convene each month – a mix of city staff from all different work areas, City partners, community groups, engaged citizens, and even local developers.

The Tiger Team is a great example of how collaboration across the organization can create the environment to develop creative and impactful solutions. The Tiger Team makes use of the skills and expertise of Calgary. It helps the city become more collaborative to implement solutions that have long-lasting impact by engaging with its different stakeholders in a unique and meaningful way.

The process starts with a client who owns a complex challenge that could benefit from

a broad range of perspectives and innovation thinking. Often these challenges are brought forward by City of Calgary staff, but occasionally community partners' challenges are also dealt with.

The Tiger Team tackles a different problem every month. In each 2.5 hour session, the Tiger Team will use a combination of exercises to accomplish the tactics below to co-create together:

- Explore, understand, and reframe the challenge
- Generate, sort, and evaluate, as many ideas as possible for a solution
- Prototype potential solutions in a low-cost, quick and effective way
- Get users to test and interact with the prototype to gather feedback and learn fast
- Find and build the critical relationships to tackle future work
- Create working tools for future use in this challenge

Example projects that the Tiger Team has taken on include building business awareness in unlikely ways during massive construction projects, better coordination of snow and ice control efforts as a City (since Calgary has very harsh winters), encouraging City staff to take more risks, and working with citizens to improve neighbour-





hood navigation. Tiger Team also worked with the City's Planning Department to improve the web-based, interactive map which helps citizens learn more about their neighbourhood and contribute feedback for city building. The session focused on improving their interface through user testing and generating future state ideas and tactics. Tiger Team also worked with the New Central Library Service Design team to build design thinking skills and test four prototypes for engaging with citizens around controversial topics such as public art and vulnerable populations.

Consider the following specific project: when utility work threatened to close a road through a major business district for up to two years, a Tiger Team held a series of design sessions with concerned citizens and business owners. Together they

arrived at the clever solution to convert the alleyway behind the businesses into a temporary main street – businesses have even hosted alley parties there. The idea required moving trash and recycling out of the alley, changing street signs, and other forms of municipal flexibility that would have been hard to achieve otherwise. This ordeal demonstrates how the Tiger Teams is listening to citizens in a way they haven't before.

The Tiger Team later was showcased at a session of the Canadian Institute of Transportation Engineers conference, and at a national Municipal Innovators Conference.



# 7

## Ninove Belgium's 100x100 Campaign: Crowdsourcing Resident Proposals to City Council

The mid-sized city of Ninove in Belgium recently launched their "100 x 100" campaign to encourage more participation in local politics. The idea is simple: if your idea gets at least 100 votes in 100 days, it will be discussed by the city council within the next two months and you'll get personalized feedback on your proposal. If your proposal does not hit the 100 vote threshold within that time period, you will still receive feedback as to why not on the website itself.

As of early 2021, 873 residents have participated in this project and 7 proposals have passed the threshold to be discussed by the council.

How exactly does it work? Residents of Ninove can submit proposals on the agenda via this platform. Preferred proposals are concrete and arise from a need, desire, or a dream, and are linked to local policy. They can be submitted either individually or can come about together with others.

It is important that the involvement of the Ninove city government is necessary and possible in any elaboration or realization

of proposals. In the best case, those who submit are also willing to think further or cooperate. For example, "Reduce the speed limit on the motorway to 80 km per hour" is not a good proposition; "transforming Kerkstraat avenue into a residential street" is. If the city government needs more info, they will let you know via an update or comment. The city government is officially involved on the platform and actively monitors content that is posted.

Criteria for submitted proposals includes:

- Within the means of local government
- Serves the public interest, not an individual's interest
- Does not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, or age
- Does not harm others
- Budgetary feasible, up to 5,000 euros
- Feasible in terms of timing
- Different from existing proposals on the platform







# 8

## Rueil-Malmaison France's Online Platform: Direct Dialogue with Citizens on Budgets to Pandemics

The French commune of Rueil-Malmaison (78,152 inhabitants), in the west suburbs of Paris, launched a participation platform in 2018 to give citizens a better voice in the decision making process. Rueil kicked off its digital engagement platform with a wide-scale participatory budget. In 2019, citizens had one and a half months to submit innovative projects for the city. In addition to collecting ideas through the platform, the municipality also installed physical ballot boxes at the town Hall, ensuring true inclusivity for participants with limited access to digital tools. All citizens older than 16 could participate, as long as they could prove their residence in Rueil-Malmaison.

After this initial selection round by Rueil-Malmaison, the community had two weeks to vote for their favorite ideas: after each citizen had fulfilled an online identification form, they could vote for three projects, according to a preferential system: the first choice gets three points, the second choice two points, and the third choice one point. The projects with the most points would get implemented, potentially in cooperation with the idea's initiator.

The local city council set three clear criteria for potential ideas:

- The project should serve the general interest.
- The idea should fit one of the seven narrowly defined identified policy areas: planning of public spaces, citizenship, social or digital innovation, solidarity, hobbies, cleanliness.

- Although the total available budget for citizen inspired projects was €200,000, each idea on its own could only have a maximum budget of €40,000.

Before the ideas were added to the platform the municipality checked compliance with these three criteria. A team of relevant municipal experts also looked into the technical, legal and financial aspect of every suggested project.

The communication campaign was supported by a series of visuals used in emails, posters and on the platform, helping create a clear and impactful message which increased the awareness of the platform.

The participatory budget was a great success - over 30,000 participants visited the platform (nearly 40% of the town's population), and 156 ideas made it past the initial check by city government officials. Following the vote, Rueil-Malmaison shared the 8 winning projects on the platform that will be implemented in the community:

- Installing smart urban LED lights with a presence detector;
- Creating new "freshness" zones in the city center
- Creating a shared family garden in the village of Rueil-sur-Seine;
- Installing collective compost points;
- Building a sports area with equipment on the Esplanade Bellerive;
- Dedicate spaces for street art;





- Install sorting bins in schools;
- Teach road safety in local schools

The strength of this participatory budget doesn't only lie in big numbers: throughout the project city officials communicated very clearly about expectations and next steps, engaging the users over several months. Although the project is now over two years old, the ideas, comments and city updates are all still viewable on the online platform. Regular communications and public updates about each project have helped the city create a bond of trust with citizens, which has been instrumental in the platform's later successes.

After the spring of 2019, new projects were regularly added to help maintain regular activity on the online platform and support the steady increase of new users. Then, in March 2020, as the country ground to a halt and most of the city's projects were put on pause due to the COVID-19 pandemic, registrations spiked.

As France went into a strict lockdown, Rueil-Malmaison made it a priority to maintain a dialogue with citizens. The city used the existing online platform to share information with inhabitants, to coordinate local volunteering efforts but also to organize online community events.

Local businesses shared information about online deliveries and opening hours; citizens shared ideas about child activities during lockdown; and volunteers organized online

events like e-sport tournaments and an egg hunt for inhabitants, where chocolate was later delivered to participants. The platform went beyond its usual role as a consultation tool to serve as an online civic space, keeping community members connected and creating a true sense of mutual support.

Between March 17 and June 11, 2020, the platform recorded more than 43,000 sessions, an increase of more than 30% compared to the previous period. These visits to the platform also had a very tangible effect: the city received close to 30,000 masks, made by the 285 volunteer seamstresses who registered through the platform. Over 6,000 food baskets were delivered to families in need, and 353 isolated and at risk inhabitants got their groceries delivered by volunteers. Close to 2,700 inhabitants took part in the online events organized on the platform.

The success of the platform during lockdown is largely due to the previous efforts made by the city to build trust on the platform and to create lasting dialogue with citizens. The Rueil example shows how a digital tool can go beyond its initial consultation purpose and connect communities in times of need. The momentum that started on the platform hasn't stopped: since lockdown has eased, new projects have been launched to clean up the surrounding woods, and hundreds of citizens have already signed up. The city is now looking to grow the team responsible for the platform.



# 9

## Youth Circles: Engaging the Youth in Policymaking

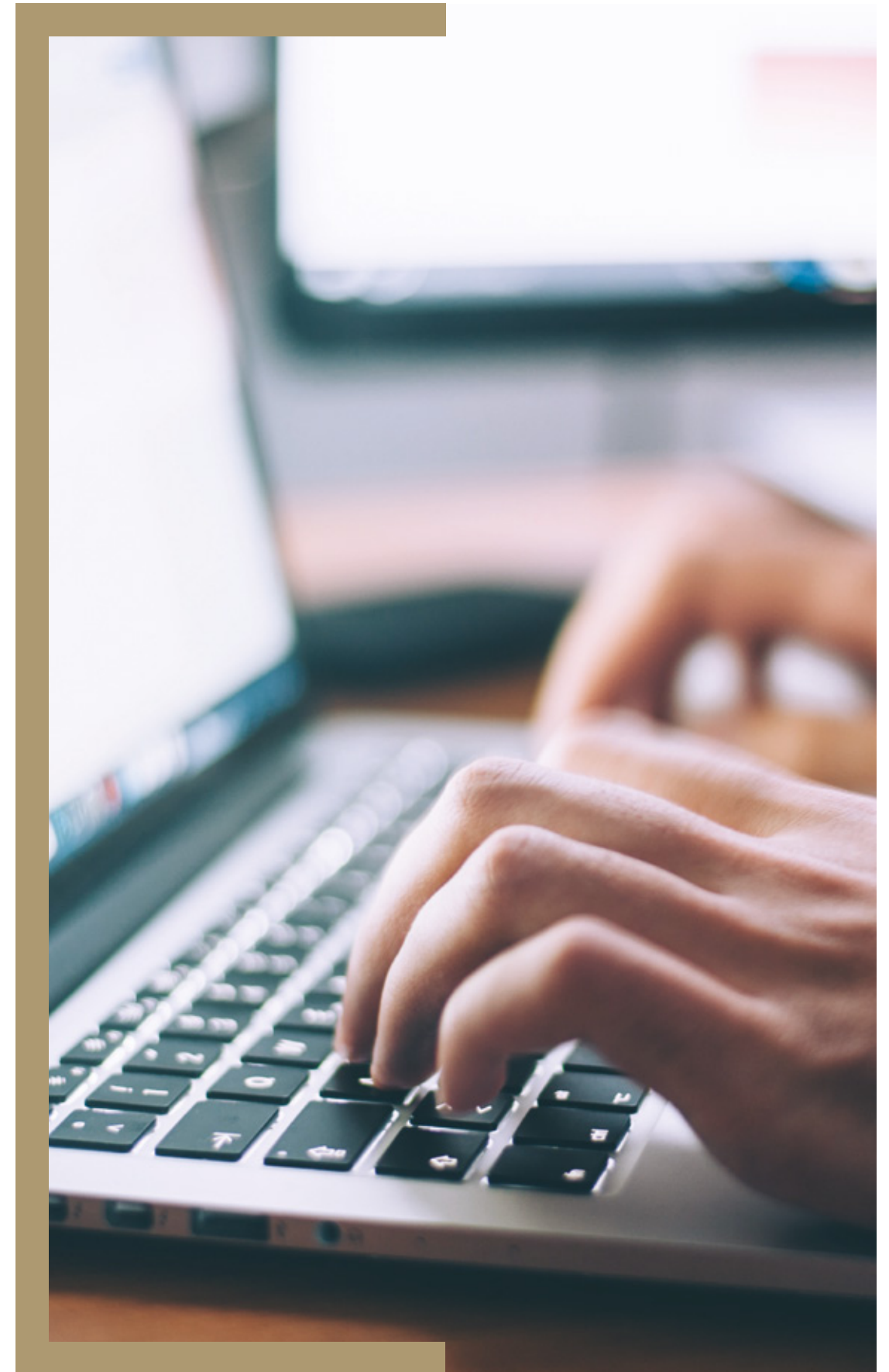
Young people are key to establishing policies that are effective to meet their needs in the present, and shaping the future. The participation of young people in decision-making processes - be they political, civic, civil society or other - fosters their active citizenship, enhances their inclusion, and strengthens their contribution to the advancement of society and the economy.

In an effort to engage youth in the UAE to shape solutions for the future, the UAE government started an initiative called Youth Circles. Governed by Federal Youth Authority and launched by H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE, and Ruler of Dubai, this initiative aims to inspire youth-centric dialogue across a variety of areas for sustainable engagement with Youth to shape innovative solutions for global challenges.

These Youth Circles exist as forums to enable youth to express their opinions on societal issues and policy matters, and to catalyze community impact and youth leadership. Comprising of young people from different genders, age groups, and fields, each Youth Circle seeks to answer one central question through action-oriented discussion and youth-inspired recommendations. It also seeks to run new ideas by youth, test the waters and receive their feedback on upcoming policies or projects. Furthermore, these Youth

Circles also serve as a platform for the UAE government to gather data from youth, obtain the youth's recommendations and crowdsource ideas, skills and talents to shape solutions or develop policies. Finally, these Circles also enable the UAE government to broadcast key messages to youth.

The concept of the circles is considered a significant part, with its root derived from the history of Emirati culture and civilization. As Emirati community members used to hold Majlis meetings in order to share their knowledge and ideas. These Circles build the knowledge base for youth and qualify them to be more proficient in their work, as well as it can be beneficial for the decision makers and help them to understand the aspirations of youth, their priorities, and the challenges they face. In each Circle, the topic and its axis are presented firstly, and then youth hold a dialogue with decision makers about the facts of such a topic and the challenges that fall under it. Accordingly, decision makers and youth have to work together hand in hand to find solutions for these challenges and how to overcome them. Youth Circles are organized periodically, where in best practices are presented and the most important issues related to youth, their aspirations and the faced challenges, are discussed, aiming at coming up with practical solutions, innovative ideas and effective policies.



The format of each Youth Circle is consistent, and is centered around three main components namely:

- **15 Minutes Presentation:** At this stage, the Circle's topics are identified, with the topic discussed for a period of not less than 15 minutes.
- **45 Minutes Dialogue:** The youth and decision makers will highlight the best practices and challenges under the topic for 45 minutes
- **45 Minutes Solutions:** The youth and decision makers will work to develop best solutions, recommendations and policies together at the end of the Circle for 45 minutes

Youth Circles can be hosted by entities in both public and private sector around the world. The host will organize the circle based on the manual and standards developed by Federal Youth Authority. The Federal Youth Authority is responsible for training the participating youth speakers, reviewing the topics, and making all related media announcements.

Since its inception, 292 circles have been held to explore youth and future skills, youth and entrepreneurship, youth and finance, Emirati women in workforce, youth and tolerance, engaging and empowering youth for a sustainable future, skills-based education for social impact, and youth's role in implementing UAE's 2021 vision. In February 2016, Youth Council members participated in the World Government Summit - Shaping Future Governments. In November 2016, Youth Council members participated in the UAE student forum in Washington DC, which provides students with opportunity to share their experiences, as well as meet with UAE advisors, leaders,

and companies. At this event, the council launched the Emirates Global Youth Council.

The circles resulted in implementation several projects, including:

- The launch of 100 mentor program which resulted in the nomination of 100 experts to act as mentors for Emirati youth and continuously develop their skills
- Announcement of a grant and support of DP World for youth projects
- Partnering with Roads and Transport Authority in Dubai to develop youth enterprise support initiative
- Drafting the agenda of UAE youth sending two youth representatives to discuss it in the United Nations Youth Delegates Program
- Launching Youth Data Hub, a partnership with LinkedIn to collect data on youth contributing to future policy advocacy and decision making
- Launching of Kafa'at Internship Fair, a partnership with Emirates Foundation to provide internship opportunities for students
- Launching of Future Innovators Academy 2017, a one month innovation program, for Emirati youth aged 17-25 years

Recent circles have been focused on a variety of topics including Youth Climate Action; Switching to Renewable Energy in Light of the Persistence of Covid-19; A Safe and Sustainable Youth Economy; Youth and Future in Customs Work; Empowering the Next Generation; The Future of Jobs in Defense Enterprises; and Youth View of the Future of Waste Management.





# 10

## Largescale Society Engagement in Designing the Next 50 - UAE

2021 marked the year of UAE's golden jubilee. In an effort to plan for the next 50 years, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of UAE and Ruler of Dubai, launched 'Designing the Next 50' project to involve the public in shaping the future of the UAE. Launched in 2020, this initiative aimed to invite and engage Citizens and residents to join a new project aimed at shaping the future of the UAE.

The project was part of the larger set of initiatives to craft the national strategy that will prepare the UAE for the next 50 years. The main objective of the project was to bring together all members of the society to establish the pillars and components of the UAE Centennial Plan 2071 - a comprehensive development plan for the next five decades beyond 2021.

At the core of the 'Designing the Next 50' initiative, was an open digital platform that was designed to gather ideas from citizens and residents on shaping the UAE's next 50 years in sectors including health, education, social development, economy, environment, housing, tourism, entrepreneurship, investment, skill development, societal values, culture, family relations, sports, youth, food security, science and advanced technologies.

These inputs were reviewed by specialized teams and filtered to lists of the 'top ideas / recommendations' for the future. These were then offered as inputs to the other

components of the initiative, e.g. expert studies and government workshops. The project's numerous events and activities resulted in a unified societal vision to make the UAE one of the world's best countries to live in within the next five decades.

Under this public engagement initiative, and on top of the open digital ideation platform, various meetings brought together Ministers from the UAE Government with members of the public who represented the various segments of the diverse society and allowed the Ministers to capture their aspirations and ideas for the future in the country. Another engagement component was panel discussions, remote meetings, surveys, and brainstorming sessions that brought public and private entities with the public to work together to develop ideas and recommendations of shaping the future of all sectors and fields across the UAE. In addition,

Furthermore, to enhance UAE's global competitiveness across all sectors, the private sector was engaged regularly through this project. The team in charge of the overall initiative hosted the country's national and global companies, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), start-ups and entrepreneurs in different events and discussions. A series of interactive events that brought the policy makers with the country's business sector representatives highlighted the private sector's pivotal role in driving the economy.



Another segment to engaged was the country's Youth. In cooperation with the Ministry of Culture and Youth, a special edition of "youth circles" was held to inspire dialogue among young people and better understand their views and aspirations towards the future and enabling them to generate ideas that could drive future policies or even government investments. Students in schools were also engaged. Workshops are being held in public schools to discuss the main themes of the project. For example, in November 2020, a group of students in Abu Dhabi participated in a dedicated workshop where they discussed the four themes of the initiative: Future Lifestyle, Sustainability & Future of Environment, Future of Emirati Values and Future Jobs and Talents. These sessions were led by the Ministry of Education.

Other UAE government entities also launched events specific engagement targeting their stakeholders. For example, in October 2020, the Ministry of Community Development (MoCD), launched an online series of dialogues to discuss the work of society associations and engage them, whether they work in the social, humanitarian, economic or scientific fields, in exploring future challenges and designing

solutions to develop this vital sector. The series of dialogues hosted more than 500 representatives from 200 NGOs, in addition to experts and specialists in the fields of volunteering and humanitarian work.

Similarly, in November 2020, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) launched the activities of a 2-day virtual brainstorming workshop titled: "With your ideas, we shape the future of the UAE for the next 50".

All the plethora of engagements provided various benefits. Most importantly, it generated a great sense of community ownership of the plan. It also generated hundreds for creative and forward looking ideas, for all parts of the UAE society that will propel the UAE to further success in the coming 50 years.



**MBRinnovation** [mbrcgi.gov.ae](http://mbrcgi.gov.ae) [ibtekr.org](http://ibtekr.org)