Ten Tools for Digital Engagement from our Engagement Toolkit

MODUS Planning, Design & Engagement
1. Fill In The Blank Visioning Wall

Group Input Tool - Time, Depth, Cost Level: 1

What
A fill in the blank visioning wall allows participants to dream big and describe their ideal future for the community.

Why
- Participants create a vision without worrying about details.
- Participants learn what various people want in the future.
- Key themes emerge to form a community vision.
- Opens space for some creative thinking.

How
1. On a large board, write: “In the future I would like my community to be ______.”
2. Ask the participants to use sticky notes to share their desires for the future.

Variation for kids:
Provide paper and crayons/markers and ask them to draw a picture of what they’d like to see in their community or what they would like it to look like in the future. This variation is also great to use with adults if you would like to unleash some creative thinking.

Variation for a specific building or site:
Provide a suitable space for comments (i.e. poster board, chalkboard, stickers) and write: “In the future I would like this to be a ____________.” This variation is a great way to stimulate informal community dialogue and receive input from people walking past the site who might not normally attend public events or provide feedback.

Where/When
This activity can be used at public open houses or stakeholder workshops and provides a good starting point to identify key priorities. This activity also travels well, and can be used in an information centre or a community events booth.
2. Hopes & Fears

*Group Input Tool - Time, Depth, Cost Level: 1*

**What**

Hopes and fears is a quick exercise that allows participants to express their concerns and excitement about the upcoming project at the very beginning of an event. Participants write down their top hopes and fears about the future to share with others.

**Why**

- Provides a sense of openness and listening right from the start.
- Reduces tension.
- Participants learn from each other.
- Key themes emerge early on.
- Builds trust.

**How**

1. On a large board, write: “Please reflect for a moment on the [insert project title here] as a whole”. Have one section devoted to people’s “hopes” and another for their “fears.”
2. Ask the participants to use sticky notes to share 1 hope and 1 fear and place on the board. Depending on group size, participants can write down more than one hope and fear. This will give a broader view of the issues.
3. Let the participants know that the comments will be used to make the project as responsive to their input as possible.

**Variations:**

What do you LOVE and what would you CHANGE about ____?

What is the BEST/WORST thing that could happen?

**Where/When**

This activity can be used at initial public open houses or stakeholder workshops and provides a good starting point to identify opportunities and issues at the beginning of the process. This activity works best when this is the first activity participants are likely to complete. This will allow participants to get their rant (if any) off their chest right at the start allowing for the discussion to move forward in a more positive manner.

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**Requirements:**

- Large poster or flip chart paper
- Markers
- Sticky notes/post-its

**Digital Suitability:**

This activity is suitable for digital engagement, but a “fill in the blank visioning wall” would be a better alternative.
3. Sustain-a-bucks

Group Input Tool - Time, Depth, Cost Level: 2

What

Sustain-a-bucks is a voting tool where participants spend their sustainability dollars or “sustain-a-bucks” according to their priorities. Participants are given a limited number of sustain-a-bucks (e.g. poker chips), and drop them in labeled buckets to vote on where they want to see planning efforts focused. Participants indicate their top priorities and come to understand that not everything can be “fixed” all at once.

Considerations:

● No description of why participants voted the way they did. Provide sticky notes for participants to write down comments or questions.
● Tool captures overall or average top priorities for all participants, not the top priorities for each participant.
● Can be renamed if topic is not related to sustainability.
● Informed staff member should stand by to clarify any questions.
● Not statistically valid; more of a learning tool and discussion starter.

Why

● Easy to learn and contribute.
● No heavy data collection or processing.
● Educational tool to generate further thinking.

How

1. Develop a display board that explains the exercise and the role of the participant (i.e. “Imagine - you are in charge of community spending. You have only 10 Sustain-a-Bucks to spend on your community, but many different needs and priorities. How would you spend your funding? Use your Sustain-a-Bucks to decide.”).
2. Give each participant 10 marbles (“bucks”) to drop into the jars which represent various topics relating to infrastructure, social, economic, environmental, and livability. Generally, no more than 10 topics should be chosen (i.e. jars labeled renewable energy, affordable housing, alternative transportation, parks, etc.).

Variation:

Pose the question in survey/workbook form where participants have X dollars to allocate to community needs. List the topics and have them write in how much $ they would spend on each topic.

Where/When

This activity is most suitable at ideas fairs, community events, or other broad public feedback events.
4. Dotmocracy / Likert Scales
Group Input Tool - Time, Depth, Cost Level: 2

What
Dotmocracy and Likert Scale exercises are similar – they both involve asking participants to “vote” for a preferred option using stickers. A Likert Scale asks participants to respond according to a 5-point scale - strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree. Dotmocracy is more flexible, because participants can just “vote” on statements or images they support, for example.

Why
- Quick method to “vote” or find top issues or levels of support.
- Shows respondents how other people feel.
- Dotmocracy captures overall or average top priorities for all participants, not the top priorities for each participant.
- Likert Scales show areas of strong agreement/disagreement.

How
1. Select statements or images that you would like feedback on and decide whether you are designing an ideas fair activity (interactive display boards) or an interactive workshop.
2. For the workshop, pick one statement for every 20 minutes. Print the statement in large type on paper approximately 36” wide, and draw a 5-point scale below the statement. Ask participants to read the statement and take a moment to think about it. Then, have participants place a sticker on the scale that best matches their response. Finally, ask participants to write down why they voted this way on a sticky note, taking turns to share their response and add their comments near their vote on the scale. It’s OK if participants want to “move” their original vote.
3. For the interactive display boards, you can pick more statements/images but try to choose fewer than 20 and no more than 5 per board. On each board, list the statements/images with voting instructions. You can ask participants to vote for their top 3 statements/images, or simply record if they agree or disagree. Or, you can include Likert (5-point) Scales.
4. An easy way to show the results is to show a total of how many people responded, and the percentage of them that agree.

Where/When
This activity works best at ideas fairs and interactive workshops. It is best suited for testing policy options or choosing a preferred direction.
5. Visual Preference Survey

**Group Input Tool - Time, Depth, Cost Level: 2**

**What**

A visualization technique that allows participants to determine preferences for physical design alternatives (community design, architectural styles, land/streetscaping, and built environment options). This technique allows for citizen-based land use planning, visualization of land use and transportation planning, and visioning and consensus-building.

**Why**

- Helps participants understand land use and transportation concepts and information intuitively
- Allows participants to rate or rank preferences
- Active participation leads to consensus-building and deeper understanding in:
  - Community and urban design features
  - Transportation sub-area or corridor studies
  - Transportation alternatives development and analysis
  - Large-scale regional planning efforts
  - Visioning exercises
  - Design charrettes

**How**

1. Determine the type of visual preference survey.
   a. Community specific – photos of actual design options from a specific community
   b. Conceptual – images that provide visual or graphic representations of conceptual design options
   c. Generic – photos or images of actual design options in another community, to be applied in another community context
2. Collect images during field work or online.
3. Develop the survey tool (or combination of tools).
   a. Written ballot
   b. Structured or self-administered questions
   c. Facilitated discussion, focus group
   d. Open house or semi-structured workshop
   e. Online questionnaire
4. Administer the survey tool.

**Where/When**

This technique is best used when there are a number of determined alternatives for physical design projects. It can be used during in-person and online engagement.

**Requirements:**

- Photo or image examples
- Display material, voting stickers for in-person

**Digital Suitability:**

This activity is suitable for digital engagement, particularly as a part of an online questionnaire.
What

This tool enables participants to brainstorm and think through ideas on their own time. Without careful design, in-person events can lack enough time for reflection. Designing workbooks can provide participants with additional quiet time to reflect on and answer questions.

Considerations:

- Process is more time consuming than basic surveys and may result in fewer responses.
- Can be used to begin uncovering priorities, assets, issues, challenges, and to elicit input on goals or options.
- Can be time-consuming to analyze results.
- Consider offering prizes to encourage participation.

Why

- Educates and frames issues for participants.
- Creates flexibility for participants.
- Feedback will be very informative.
- Not everyone can attend or feel comfortable participating in public meetings – this activity allows everyone to have a voice.
- Offers more time to dig deeper into issues.

How

1. Establish topics/questions and develop background materials.
2. Create workbooks with questions and space for comments.
3. Distribute workbooks in person at engagement events, distribute to key stakeholders/groups, and or raise awareness about online workbooks.
4. Gather feedback.

Variation:

Use workbooks to guide group discussions (see Community Circles/Kitchen Table Conversations Tool).

Where/When

This activity can be performed at home (either on paper or online). Workbooks can be used to inform participants about important background information and to dive deeper into issues that are identified in earlier stages of the process. Allowing a month for feedback is usually sufficient.
7. Media Contest

*Individual Input Tool - Time, Depth, Cost Level: 1*

**What**

Media-based contests can be used to inspire participants to develop creative solutions or ideas related to your project. This type of feedback can stimulate unique ideas that would otherwise not be included in your engagement process. Art, photos or videos can also be used for marketing or branding your project.

**Considerations:**

- Consider prizes for different age categories.
- Use local products/services for prizes.
- Display entries within the community or consider creating a community calendar from the submissions.
- Using social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, and Twitter for submissions can help spread word about your project.

**Why**

- Engages participants in a fun and interactive way.
- Encourages creative responses.
- Suitable for all ages.

**How**

1. Develop your key question(s) or topic for the contest (i.e. “what do you love most about ______”).
2. Decide whether it will be an art, photo, or video contest, or be open to any type of creative input.
3. Determine how the contest will be judged (i.e. staff or community voting).
4. Find some fabulous prizes.
5. Advertise within the community and raise awareness about the contest and prizes. Let people know what it is for, what is required, and when/where to submit entries.
6. Receive entries and post them in the community (physically and or digitally). Decide on the winners and award the prizes! Report out to the community on the winners and the process.

**Where/When**

This activity can be done at the beginning of the process to raise awareness and excitement about the project and engagement process and to identify key ideas and opportunities.
8. Community Mapping
*Group Input Tool - Time, Depth, Cost Level: 3*

**What**

Community mapping asks participants to record important places directly on a map. This lets people participate without having to have strong language, spelling or other literacy skills.

**Considerations:**
- Limited by printers.
- Impact of exercise may not be initially seen by participants.

**Why**
- Visual tool that is easily accessible and engaging/tactile.
- Taps directly into local knowledge.
- Easily communicates local knowledge to participants and staff.

**How**

1. Get a high-resolution, high quality base map (e.g. Google Maps, GIS, Bing Maps). If none are available, use a hand drawn map.
2. Post maps on display boards or tables for groups to work on.
3. Ask people to describe the area by recording their views and opinions on post-it notes and sticking them on the map.
4. Typical questions asked include, “What do you love about where you live/work/play?” or “What needs improvement in this area?” You can also ask more specific questions (and perhaps use icon-based stickers to capture them), such as, “Which are the best cycle routes? Where’s the best view in county? Where would you go to see wildlife? Which intersections feel unsafe?”
5. The facilitator’s role is important, because s/he asks participants why they selected this location and helps to record notes.
6. After the event, maps can be scanned, digitized, photographed and/or replicated into an electronic format, GIS, or Google Maps.

**Variation:**

Walkable Map is a variation in which a large map is printed and placed in the floor in order for residents to be able to “walk” their community (generally 10x17 feet with at least a scale of 1:7000).

**Where/When**

This activity can be used at an ideas fair or interactive workshop. It provides a good starting point to identify opportunities and issues at the beginning of the process.
What

A fill in the blank campaign allows participants to dream big and describe their ideal future. Using SMS (text messages) rather than a poster or social media means that the participant cannot see how other people responded. This method works best when used in conjunction with social media and other ways of “filling in the blank.”

Why

- Allows participants to create a vision without worrying about details
- Key themes emerge to form a community vision

How

1. Identify the key question you will ask (i.e. “In the future I would like my community to be ________.”)
2. Arrange a phone number to receive feedback
3. Advertise your SMS campaign throughout the community to encourage participation

Where/When

This activity can be done at the beginning of the engagement process to identify key priorities and develop a vision for moving forward.

Requirements:

- Phone number capable of receiving a large number of text messages
- System that texts participants back to say that feedback has been received. Poll Everywhere is one software option that supports this.

Digital Suitability:

This activity is suitable for Twitter and as a Facebook Wall activity.
What

Opt-in surveys or questionnaires are useful tools to collect data, gather opinions on options, and gauge support for the process. They can also provide a snapshot of opinions, across a wide range of demographic groups. It is important to note that they may not be statistically-valid. But, if enough people participate and demographic information is captured, the results can be weighted to be a representative sample.

Considerations:

- Be sure your questions are clear, your survey is short, and that you clearly communicate what you will do with input received. Try to aim for a survey that can be completed in 5 to 10 minutes.
- Surveys will get more uptake if you make them available in a variety of formats: online, at events, by mail, electronic kiosks, etc.
- Use questionnaires when you have definitive questions to ask - i.e. multiple choice as opposed to open ended.
- Consider the type of input you will get and how you plan to analyze it when you are selecting the questions to your survey. Keep in mind that qualitative questions (i.e. open ended comments) take longer to analyze but can provide important information. You may want to use a word limit for open-ended questions.

Note: take care to review requirements for protection of privacy when using survey tools. Ensure they store people’s personal information on a Canadian server.

Why

- Surveys are useful when wanting to reach the broad population and to help decide areas to focus on in project, understand key issues, develop key themes (exploratory – early on in process).
- Elicit feedback on/review of a discreet set of information (e.g. with key group such as steering committee).
- Sparks dialogue.

Where/When

Surveys can be used at essentially any point during the engagement process. They are useful at the beginning of the process to identify initial issues and opportunities, in the middle of the process to assess options or, near the end of the process to help with final decisions and to ask for feedback on the engagement process.

Continued on following page...
Best practices for online surveys:

- How to develop online surveys that work. Author: InsightExpress
- Survey Design (numerous articles from Qualtrics)
- Smart Survey Design - Best Practices Document. Author: SurveyMonkey Inc.
- Journal of the American Association for Public Opinion Research
- “How statistically valid are your survey results?”
- Ipsos Public Affairs “Credibility Intervals for Online Polling”
- Center for Advances in Public Engagement (CAPE) “Promising Practices in Online Engagement”

How

1. Know what information you want to obtain from the survey and how you will use the information you obtain (be clear with respondents).
2. Help ensure sound question design by having whomever will be responsible for analysis review questions.
3. Avoid leading and yes/no questions. Try to ask why or how questions instead.
4. Keep surveys short (20 questions or less)
5. Need diversity of questions, e.g.: open-ended (include one-word-answer, open-ended); True/False; choose top 5; ranking; general/motherhood (e.g. to show support); questions that incorporate trade-offs/framing questions (energy efficiency vs. cost – to get at values); pairing questions (e.g. choose between police and public library).

Variations:

Can be used at meetings to make group decisions. If you have the technology, you could set up a live feedback tool, or you could simply use voting cards (agree/disagree) to allow participants to see the results immediately.