

BIG ISSUE #2: Integrating Offline and Online Engagement

Online community engagement provides a range of opportunities to complement, supplement and otherwise enhance f2f community engagement processes.

PRINCIPLES

Online consultation is generally, but not necessarily, complementary to offline consultation rather than a replacement.

Note: Exceptions may include projects with very small budgets, very large geographic ranges, or both.

Determine the most appropriate consultation tool for the audience and consultation objective, rather than beginning by focussing on the latest tool.

Develop the overall consultation strategy first and then run the online process in parallel with f2f process using relatable tools, e.g. online survey match f2f surveys.

Ensure consultation managers respond consistently to enquiries whether in an online or off-line environment.

Build trust through time with the online "audience" by being consistent in terms of commitment to the online space, responsiveness and "closing the loop" when projects wrap up.

As with off-line engagement processes, "deeper" engagement - such as deliberative dialogue - requires significantly more planning and focus on methodology than "shallow" engagement - such as brainstorming. It also requires far greater commitment on the part of the participants.

PLANNING & PREPARATION

- Establish the specific role of the online consultation process in the overall consultation strategy, e.g. to gather community ideas; to test existing concepts, or; to validate plans.
- Carefully plan the rollout of the online tools through time to match the overall consultation strategy.
- Properly resource the online component of the consultation strategy.
- Develop clear guidelines on "participation" or "moderation" rules for participants and make them easy for participants to find.
- Spend time on developing the "right" questions (whether in a forum, survey, or guestbook) to elicit good quality responses.



LINKING F2F WITH ONLINE

- Video key speakers at public meetings and place this online.
- Use closed forums to compliment f2f discussions and to provide an avenue for in-depth discussion.
- Promote the online engagement opportunities at all off-line events
- Promote the online engagement opportunities on all offline collateral, e.g. use QR codes on posters.
- Use tablet computers to capture f2f feedback and stories from field surveys directly into online environment.
- Use desktop computers in kiosks/project offices/open house spaces to capture feedback directly into online environment.

LINKING ONLINE WITH F2F

- Use the online environment to provide rich and meaningful information to participants prior to f2f gatherings.
- Use the online environment to gather thoughts on critical agenda items for upcoming f2f processes.
- Use online forums to understand the nature and scope of debate and critical leverage points prior to f2f dialogue and decision making processes.
- Use online guestbook or storyboards to gather rich stories for deeper analysis through f2f processes.
- Use online surveys to gather broad community feedback as an input to f2f discussions.