

The Ultimate Guide Building Your Engagement Sites



socialpinpoint
FROM mysite

What are engagement websites?

We are living in an age where citizens not only want the opportunity to share their opinions on decisions that affect them but they also expect to have a voice in their communities. Many organizations struggle with creating a consistent and inviting space for stakeholders to provide feedback.

Community engagement pages make it easy to quickly create, update and manage a project website without any web or coding experience.

By using a dedicated engagement site, you create a space where citizens can visit at any time for updates on projects or to provide feedback. This ultimately builds trust between organizations and stakeholders, leading to better project outcomes.

In this e-book, we have outlined the key considerations when creating an engagement website and how to continually evolve your 'digital-first' community engagement methods.



Over 80% of citizens interact with Social Pinpoint pages and tools through a mobile device.



Some design assets & icons sourced from:
Symbolon, Ralf Schmitzer, Andrey Vasiliev,
Chanut is Industries, monkik from the Noun Project

Before You Start

Before you dive in and build a beautiful engagement site with all of the bells and whistles, it's important to pause to consider the purpose and scope of the project.

Spending time upfront to identify answers to these questions will help to clarify important steps in the decision-making process.

Here we will take a deeper look at the initial questions we should answer to ensure we build our engagement tools on the strongest possible foundation.



If you don't have one already, create a style guide for your pages/platform. This way if you are using a third party to create pages as part of a project, they will be consistent with the rest of your site.



WHAT MAKES THE MOST SENSE

For This Type Of Engagement?

Hosting it on your website, or having a dedicated community engagement page?

This is a critical decision that depends on many factors.

If you have one engagement tool and a well-established website, adding that tool to an already existing site is a logical option. Once you begin to incorporate multiple tools, or introduce more than one project, finding a space to house all of the information and engagement tools becomes a cleaner option.

A dedicated project/community engagement page is a great resource

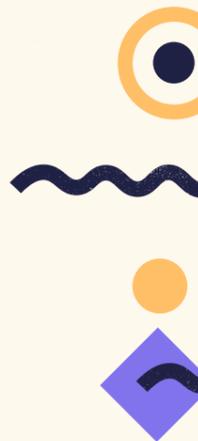
for transparency and driving more public participation on a particular project.

If a person is watching a recording from the last town hall in the same place where you have a survey or interactive tool, they are more likely to participate than if they were sent a survey independently.



Online engagement tools don't have to only be used online. We see many clients use various tools in conjunction with offline events.

Use a survey on a tablet when people arrive at your event to capture their info, display an Ideas Wall or Interactive Map on a large screen in the room and let users make comments using their phone.



DIFFERENT TYPES OF

Engagement Pages

You have plenty of options when it comes to building out your engagement pages. Here we consider three different scenarios to find the best fit for your consultation: Information Only, Full Engagement Platform and One-Off Project Pages.



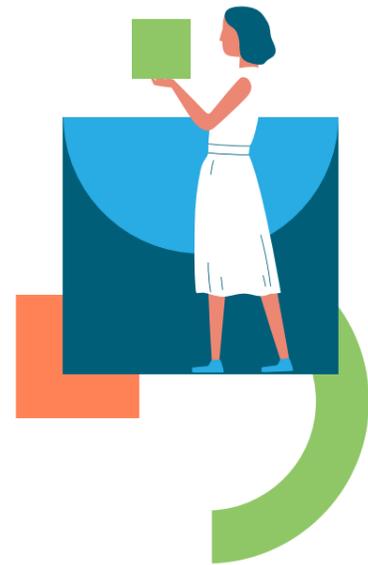
One-Off Project Page

A single project page that houses the main engagement tool for your project is a clean and simple way to get to the point of collecting feedback. This is a great option if you've already had an active engagement website for your consultation, or perhaps want to embed an engagement tool into a page that already exists.

Most engagement tools, such as Maps and Ideas Walls, will allow for marginal

space to introduce the project and instruct stakeholders on providing feedback. Content provided alongside these tools should be specific to the what and the how when it comes to your stakeholders providing feedback to make sure this call to action takes place.

A one-off project page can be an exciting place for your stakeholders to land, as long as the engagement tool is user-friendly with an intuitive interface. You'll want to apply custom branding on the page where possible to create the best first impression, making sure your page and its tools are mobile-friendly.



Information Only Pages

Not yet ready to ask for feedback, but still need to inform stakeholders about a project? Informational pages can be a great way to introduce the scope of the consultation and set stakeholder expectations.

Since informational pages can often run content heavy with multiple project components to review, it may be worth considering how you break up various sections of your page. Here are a few ideas:

Do you need to cast a vision? Embedding a video along with, or in lieu of, a banner image is both attention-grabbing and an easy method to relay a lot of information.

Break up text-heavy sections with a variety of widgets to keep things interesting. Try getting creative with finding new uses for the provided widget templates.

While the information you provide may be evident, the why may not be. Why did you bring stakeholders to your page? Be clear on why you value stakeholder engagement and what they can expect to see moving forward.

If you'd like stakeholders to revisit your page at a later date, be sure to set a call to action towards the bottom of the page before they navigate away. One example could be a survey used as a sign-up form for those who may want to stay up to date on the project, or be informed when future phases begin.



Full Engagement Platform

If your consultation doesn't already have a home base, housing your engagement tools within a full engagement website is a great one-stop-shop for your stakeholders to become both informed and involved.

At Social Pinpoint, we've observed projects housing both informational content and engagement tools on the same landing page tend to achieve greater traction. This might mean keeping your introduction short and to the point so that your engagement tools stand out on the page. Other informational content can then be

housed on child pages for stakeholders to find based on their interests.

Sharing information and encouraging engagement in one place provides an opportunity for you to guide your stakeholders to focus on what's most important. Is it best if they read the project vision statement before sharing ideas? Perhaps you need to provide documentation about the project, but don't want stakeholders to lose interest before they leave feedback? Consider using step-by-step language or eye-catching graphics to guide stakeholders to the must-see aspects of your project before they navigate away to another page. At Social Pinpoint we build engagement tool widgets to stand out among other sections on the page for this reason.



Creating a dedicated engagement website where stakeholders know they can visit anytime to engage with organizations, increases community participation by an average of 51%



Short on photos to help keep your page interesting? Head over to a free resource such as [Unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com) for relevant images at no additional cost.



TECHNICAL AND FUNCTIONAL
CONSIDERATIONS

Building Your Engagement Pages

Welcome to the fun part of the building of your page! Engagement platforms come with many tools to choose from based on the goal of your consultation. Common tools include:



ENGAGEMENT PLATFORM



INTERACTIVE MAPS



IDEAS WALL



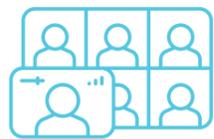
FORUMS



PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING



VIRTUAL TOWN HALL



STAKEHOLDER MANAGER



SURVEYS



ANALYTICS



INTEGRATIONS



EMBEDDED WIDGETS



GEO SURVEY



MODERATION



The first step in building your project page is to create an overall vision. Understand your How and Why and choose tools that will compliment your overall engagement strategy.

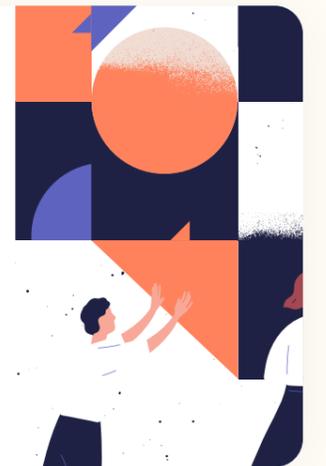
Build out these tools first so when you're ready to place them on your page, you can simply insert and populate the work you've already done. Plan on colors and themes that complement each other when building your page. Think about what might make a stakeholder want to stay on your page. You will want to be sure your page is easy to read and navigate

to ensure that users have a positive experience. Make sure your site is as accessible to as many stakeholders as possible taking into consideration their language. Most engagement platforms have a multi-language tool or Google Translate Widget, to ensure participant inclusiveness.



Clients who provide multiple pathways for participants to engage on their project on average see a 42% increase in feedback and engagement.

When considering your project URL, keep it simple and memorable. Shorter URLs tend to look cleaner, so consider getting creative with abbreviations.



EFFECTIVE TECHNIQUES TO

Driving Stakeholders To Your Pages

Traditionally with in-person community engagement efforts, the same group of stakeholders participate every time.

While their feedback is valuable, online community engagement gives us the

opportunity to connect with and hear from a much larger segment of the community.

You ideally need to come up with an engagement strategy that will allow you to continue to capture the feedback of your traditional stakeholders as well as reach new groups.

The process of marketing your consultation will be extremely different to how you would generally raise community awareness of traditional engagement opportunities. It's not as simple as putting a link on your organization's website and expecting the comments to flow in.



Clients who provide a competition or incentive for participation see an 67% increase in engagement.

Looking for an eye-catching way to get stakeholders subscribed to project updates? Design a Survey to mimic an email sign-up form to easily capture interest.



Paid advertising

It's likely you will share your online consultation to your organization's social media, however, there is also an opportunity to target Facebook users based off their location, occupation, interests, age, income levels and more.

Paid advertisements on radio, local TV stations, newspapers and direct mail are all effective ways to reach community members who don't spend time on social media. These are all great ways to raise awareness of the online engagement opportunity and direct stakeholders straight to your consultation site.



E-blast newsletters

How big is your audience? If you're using a stakeholder management platform like Consultation Manager, take advantage of the long list of stakeholders you've built up over time.

Odds are a lot of those stakeholders would love to be able to participate in a new project. Send an e-blast a week before the launch date to inform stakeholders of their opportunity to give feedback online.



Mailbox drops

Add some graphics to a postcard and ask for participation. When was the last time you got a perfectly crafted letter asking how someone could make your day better?



Compliment with offline events

Don't look at digital engagement as a replacement to traditional consultation methods, but rather as a way to expand your consultation to reach a broader audience and gain more honest and insightful input from your community and stakeholders.

One of the easiest ways to combine your online and offline efforts is to bring tablets to public meetings so you can show community members exactly how to use the engagement site. This will get them excited about being able to participate when it's convenient for them. This will inform those who would already engage to use the online tools opportunity, but how can you encourage those residents and stakeholders who are harder to reach?



Be Creative!

It is extremely effective to bring engagement opportunities straight to where community members spend their time. Many organizations do this by setting up tablets or computers at recreation centers, libraries and community events so people can explore and engage with the consultation or planning project.

One community placed a bench in a skatepark where they wrote the link to the engagement site and invited residents to write their ideas on the bench. In this specific consultation, they needed a way to reach the users of the skatepark, so they brought the engagement opportunity straight to them.



Provide multiple ways that your community can get involved on a project. Not all users will want to fill out a survey, so think about using other more interactive tools like the Ideas Wall in conjunction with your survey to drive greater participation.



TECHNIQUES TO Managing Your Project

Your engagement site is ready. You're live and open for feedback... Now what?

Having a plan on how you'll monitor, review and moderate your project feedback can help to alleviate any post-launch jitters and make sure your team is ready to make the best use of your engagement platform. Here's what you'll need to think about.

Monitoring & Moderation

The 5 W's will keep the process streamlined and manageable for your team:

Who?

Decide who on your team will be responsible for monitoring feedback. If a comment needs to be moderated or responded to, who specifically needs to be involved?

What?

What are you looking for when reviewing your feedback? Maybe you want to keep an eye out for clarity issues regarding your content or use of engagement tools.

Where?

Do you only need to monitor tools that allow for public comments, while surveys and budgeting responses can be left for aggregated data at the end? Deciding in advance where you'll focus your moderation efforts will save you time in the long run.

When?

How often will you log in to your engagement platform? Does your team need to schedule shifts of who will monitor and when?

Why?

Before the consultation launches you might consider themes, topics or language that will always be moderated so you know exactly how to respond on the spot.

Staying Up To Date

While it's tempting to settle into a 'set it and forget it' mindset with your engagement platform, keeping your pages and tools updated can help create a dynamic environment that encourages deeper stakeholder buy-in. This can look like a number of things depending on the nature of your consultation. If you're not sure where to start, consider asking this question:

"If I were a stakeholder, what would bring me back to this page?"

Results can be an easy answer here. You're already monitoring your feedback, so why not share a few pre-populated charts, or maybe a word cloud showing popular themes? Let stakeholders know that they can check back periodically for updates and insights to keep them engaged long term.

Another option? Perhaps you've noticed an unexpected theme cropping up in your feedback mid-consultation. If so, it might be worth considering another survey addition to gathering clarity around this specific topic, inviting those who engaged initially to come back and provide further detail.



Worries about your feedback getting inappropriate or out of control? Social Pinpoint includes auto-moderation which will automatically prevent any profanity, negative themes, images and URLs being publicly visible unless approved by an administrator.



USING TECHNOLOGY TO

Better Understand Your Stakeholders

Another great way to make sure you're managing your engagement in a way that gives the best return, is to take advantage of the tools and technologies on the market. This allows you to learn more about the unique stakeholders visiting your site, and how they're interacting with information available to them.

One tool to accomplish this is Google Analytics, preferred for its ease of use, and scalability depending on the size of your business.

It allows you to do quite a few things like track users to gain insights on where they're from, how they're interacting with the site, and where these visitors spend most of the time on while looking at your projects and pages. This of course is just a small sampling of what you can do, but knowing this information will allow you to see where your vital marketing effort is paying off, and how all the work you put in is driving users to your site.

What makes this type of analysis possible is information that's known as a "UTM" or Uchin Traffic Monitor code

or tag. It's one of those things that if you didn't know where to look you would never notice it. A UTM tag is that bit of information that comes after a website's basic URL, and if you're using they can let you know not only what external sites brought stakeholders to your project, but even the link they clicked on to get there.

Why is this valuable you may ask? If you can see that a certain affiliate is driving most of your traffic, you may be able to reach out and see how you are better able to work together for the benefit of both parties. You might see that increasing the attention you give to that partner results in more visitors to not only your current project, but for future projects as well.

After the Engagement Period

Congratulations on finishing your project! You've got a ton of information and now comes the deep dive into your findings.

Understanding how to use all the data you've gained is an essential part of any big initiative which includes looking at not just how many stakeholders you interacted with, but also the quality of those interactions.

Look to see where people focused their attention and on which items they viewed as the most important

to your project. Often what we first thought were important items may turn out to have been secondary to other issues. We may have either not known about them, or simply viewed them as trivial. Make sure to share your findings with as many organizations as possible and encourage others to do the same.

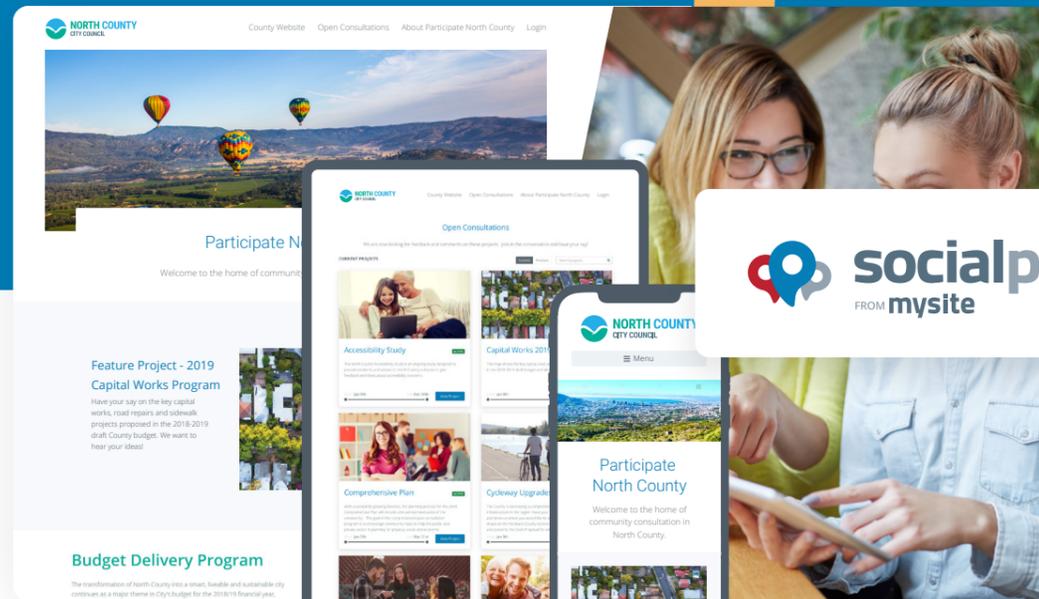


Consider UTM tags when promoting your Social Pinpoint project in a newsletter or on Social Media. This will allow you to see which responses came from that specific post and see which methods of communication is most effective at driving traffic to your project.



Our Products

My Site's products make up the complete engagement suite. With our platform integration you can seamlessly achieve best practice community and stakeholder engagement outcomes.

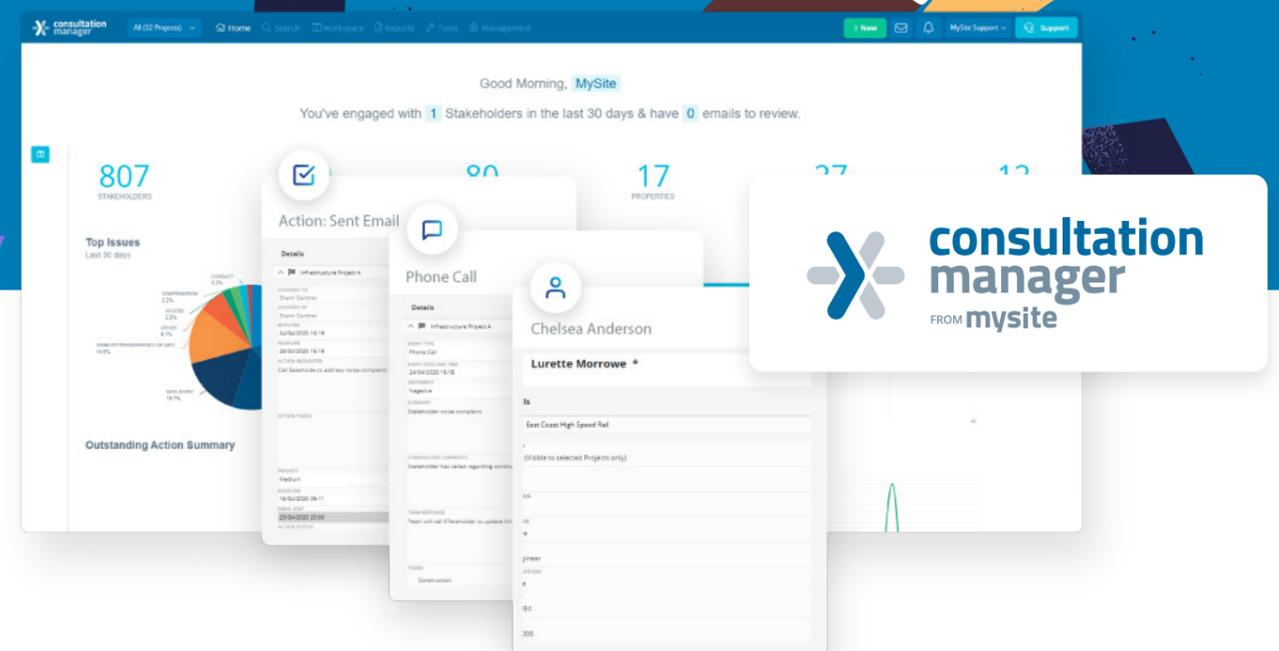


Social Pinpoint is a customizable community engagement platform hosting a suite of digital tools.

Our broad range of tools and capabilities have delivered results on thousands of community engagement projects. Some of these tools include:

Surveys, Forums, Mapping, Ideas Walls, Participatory Budgeting & engagement websites.

Use these tools to create a space to keep your community engaged and informed. Strengthen your relationship with your community and stakeholders in order to reach better planning outcomes.



Consultation Manager is a cloud-based stakeholder management platform where all of your stakeholder data is kept in one centralized location.

Our platform is used by government, private sector, and non-profit organizations to record, track, analyze, and report on their stakeholder interactions and engagement.

With unlimited projects and users and hassle-free customization you are able to tailor the platform to suit your engagement strategy, process, language and terminology.

Reporting on your stakeholder and consultation data is simple with live dashboards and instant reports that are easily exported to suit your reporting formatting requirements.

What's Next?

You should now be well and truly equipped to get started building your effective engagement websites. We would love to hear from you if you have any questions about engagement pages or our products.

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