ON COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR CIVIC SPACE DESIGN PROJECTS A Mobile App Solution to Unequal Participation and Incomplete Feedback Loop Candice Ji

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Candice Siyun Ji







ON COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR CIVIC SPACE DESIGN PROJECTS

Project Introduction

Hi, we are the design team for the Portsmouth Square post-pandemic reimagination project.



Our project goal is to reinvent the existing for new uses in concert with social a enviornemtnal needs; and we want to hear from you!



Build your community profile, share y experience in the neighborhood, and coll with us!

Start

What's your typical path on this project site?

Hint: Where do you access this site? Where do you start? Where do you exit? What's your route? Draw it on the map!



Next

Make a collage of things you would like to see on this project site!

Hint: What are the functions, elements, or activities you would like to see here? For example: I want to see water features, lightings in this plaza. Make a collage!



Next

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Civic Space Design. Dancing in Congress Square, Portland, Maine. Source: Corey Templeton

INTRODUCTION

In the spectrum of public participation designed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), current practice for public engagement in design projects has typically been limited to "consulting" and "involving" the public. Existing researches have demonstrated that the higher is the level of engagement, the higher is the requirement of physical time or digital knowledge, and therefore, the less accessible the method is for underrepresented communities.

The goal of this project is to create a learning model for civic space design and planning projects to achieve public participation on the higher end of the spectrum and facilitate a two-way "collabrating" and "empowering" engagement process.

The design outcome of this project is a mobile app that addresses existing challenges such as unequal representation, digital literacy gaps, and incomplete feedback loops. It is my hope that this project provides a two-way learning facilitation model to serve the underrepresented population, and to ultimately enhance inclusivity and equity in planning and design projects.

CONTEXT

Through literature review and interviewing practitioners in planning and design, the author highlighted and examined a few existing guidelines and digital tools that are often used for public engagement.

Existing Guidelines

Neighborhood Planning Playbook, Housing New York

A set of people-oriented guidelines for neighborhood planning process across New York City agencies with four core elements: governance, planning framework. Neighborhood analysis, and transparency.

Existing Tools

Miro

virtual whiteboard, often used for live note-taking, workshop facilitation

Mentimeter

live polling with instant feedback, often used along side large virtual meetings, generate simultaneous results

SocialPinPoint

live platform for collecting locational and topic specific input

Konevio

online portal to collect crowdsourced feedback, often used for collecting input on documents

Rose Bud, Thron

an accessible design thinking exercise consisting of three phases of questioning

Neighborland

an online platform that allows organizations to start projects by asking questions to public to collect ideas.

MindMixer

an web-based platform for community members to engage in an online public process.



🔰 Mentimeter

socialpinpoint









Existing online digital tools used for public engagement.

	INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION							
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER			
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.			
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.			
© IAP2 International Federation 2018. All rights reserved. 20181112_v1								

IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. Source: IAP2.

ISSUES

UNEQUAL PARTICIPATION

One major issue with existing engagement methods, both in-person and online, is unequal participation, culminating in a divide between both access and representation.

In-person engagement requires schedule coordination and time management. Not all stakeholders have time to participate in a public meeting or workshop, even when planned for multiple times with a long drop-in hours option.

Online engagement requires digital fluency and access. Disparities in aspects such as quality of equipment, the autonomy of use, presence of support networks, experience, and online skills can all result in partial public participation, in which only those with technological and social access can participate and give their opinion. Furthermore, there is a gap between people who participate and those who do not in both engagement methods. The level of public participation is influenced by personality, cultural differences, community context, age, gender, level of ability, professional status, access to digital infrastructure, policies, regulations, and many other factors (Estefam 2021). These underrepresented communities risk further marginalization and exclusion.

Incomplete Feedback Loop

During interviews with multiple practitioners, practitioners all emphasized the importance of the iterative feedback loop process in transforming community inputs into helpful feedback that informs planning and design decisions. The translation from community inputs to how they inform decisions is often not entirely transparent in the design and planning processes.



Matrix of Online Public Participation. This matrix shows that the current practices of digital engagement are perpetuating relations of exclusion and power. Source: Ali Estefam, 2021.

OPPORTUNITIES

To mitigate the impact of unequal participation, an accessible tool to engage the underrepresented community should be developed. To define underrepresented, this project focused on youth and working-age populations that generally do not have the ability to participate in existing engagement activities due to lack of time commitment and social incentive.

An opportunity exists to engage these populations via a mobile app platform. According to American phone usage statistics, most mobile phone users check their phones up to 63 times daily, and 13% of millennials spend over 12 hours on their phones daily (Deyan 2O21). Furthermore, today, 30% of the world's youth have been active online for at least five years; it is expected that within the next 5 years the digital native population in the developing world will double (ITU 2O13).

Hackathon				
Crowdsourcing				
Gamification				
e Mapping				
amification				
Budget Simulator				
Crowdfunding				
Open Data				
Augmented Reality				
>				
Digital Knowledge Requirements				

- In many cases, working-age and youth are actively involved in an online participatory culture with relatively low barriers to civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations (Lenhardt & Madden, 2005). The online medium has helped them to mobilize and collaborate, and it has given them a voice.
- In leveraging medium and accessibility, there are great opportunities in empowering youth and working-age populations to participate in the engagement process for planning and design projects.

GOALS

The scope and goals of this project are:

- To empower community engagement for civic space design projects
- To facilitate two-way learning dialogues between practitioners and community
- To encourage the participation of often underrepresented in conventional community engagement activities
- To supplement in-person offline engagement activities
- To bridge the gap between listening, learning, and informing design decisions

METHODOLOGY

This project's method to address the issue and achieve the goals illustrated above is an accessible mobile app.

To create the mobile app, the author first explored existing tools and researches that discusses digital engagement tools. In addition, the author interviewed four practitioners to gain a full picture of the challenges faced in the industry today and what would be the most helpful solution. The interview participants were

Ali Estefam, Vice-President/Practice Lead - Planning & Design at Melissa Johnson Associates

Dave Javid, AICP, LEED AP, Founder + Principal at Plan to Place, Engagement and Facilitation Specialist

Stefan Pellegrini, Principal at Opticos Design, Urban Design and Architecture Firm.

Al-Tariq Shabazz, Former Director of the Office of Affordable Housing, City of Newark.

Building off of existing research and digital engagement tools, this app is designed to be used, modified, and reused throughout a planning and design project to collaborate and empower a high level of public participation. The audience of this project are practitioners, including planners and designers, for civic space projects. They will have the ability to adapt the questions and activities to their respective projects. The promotion of this app usage in a project will depend on the project's physical outreach (QR codes on site, mailers) and online stimulation (email blast, social media, spread the word through community partners).

Centering on community engagement for civic space design projects, the author chose Portsmouth Square in San Francisco Chinatown as an imaginary project site; and created a fictional post-COVID-19 pandemic redesign project.



Imaginary Project Site: Portsmouth Square in San Francisco Chinatown. Source: SFMTA Photography Department

DESIGN

This app starts with a practitioners setup section. Practitioners will be asked to select basic project information and upload a site context map. Then, the practioner can continue to edit questions.



To start the engagement process, the public user will first use their own words to identify themselves, draw boundaries of their neighborhood, and demonstrate their relationship to the space by identifying key people and features they are most proud of.

BECIN	TELL US Abdut Yourself		Y RELAT TO TH
Project Introduction	How do you identify yourself?	Map your neighborhood!	r
H, we are the design team for the Portsmouth Square post-pandemic reinagination project.	Hint: We all play different roles in our lives. For example: I am a mobiler, dog-lover, Lover East Side resident, entry-loves lata duncer, gradvate student, and entrepreneur.	Hist: To what extent do you counside: "Dhis area is my neighborhood?" Draw it out on the map!	Hir
Projuct Planague Designer Designer	Grad Student	Annual	
Our project goal is to reinvent the existing space for new uses in concert with social and environmenthal needs: and we want to hear from you!	Coffeeshop frequent	B Careel	
and we want to hear more your	Foodie	THE LEAK AND	
Charles I	Live near Chinatown	CANODICAL PROVIDENCE	
	Activity seeker	中一十开	
Build your community profile, share your experience in the neighborhood, and collabrate with us!	0		
Start	Next	Next	

This section will set up the framework for the rest of the questions when in completion. The app will provide the following templates as guidelines, and the practitioners can edit each feature to adapt to their needs.

t Site Map	Edit Questions	Defining Order
Import a context base map y of both your site and your t's study area.	Our template serves as a guideline basis, but every project is different. Please feel free to modify it to fit your project context.	How do you identify
Draw Study Area	Multiple Choice 🗸	2 Map your neighborho
rerearup// Hill Northeost- Hill Historic	Flexible short answer	3 How do you identify4 Who do you care about
minimi include Alexandre	Draw on map Upload visual preference	5 What are you most pro
And	Question	6 Where would you sho7 Where would you spectrum
Second State	Hint: Add a hint for your audience 🖋 Edit Hint	Where would you spec Where would you spec
	O Option 1	What's your typical pa
American States Martine State	Add option or add "Other"	What do you typical d
Next	Required	Next

This section will inform practitioners who the responders are and how they relate to the places. Identifying people they care about can potentially generate a snowball effect to reach broader participants.

R NSHIP SPACE			
What's your ationship to project site? Wat bring: you to this place? How often do you visit?	Who do you care about in the project site neighborhood?	Who do you care about in this neighborhood? What's your relationship to them? Friend v	What are you most proud of in this neighborhood? Het: Euror is areas why you low the place you het for early larmest proof the
Working nearby	about my children, my husband, my friend and neighbor Mary, bhe homeless woman who lives around the streetcorner, Bodega owner Josh, and my pottery teacher.	What do they do?	convenience of multiple subway stations, and the diversity of ethnic restaurants in this neighborhood.
Resident		Architect 🗸	Affordable and diverse dining options
Volunteer Walks dog here	Here the second	Do they have any special needs? _{optimal} Wheelchair 🗸	Old morn and pop shops
Bring kids to play here		Seniors	Lots of kids-friendly
o	Parties Section Review Review Parties Parties Parties Parties Parties Parties Parties	Kids Respiratory Disease Additional needs	play areas
Next.	😭 Shan tika project with Harn N Exit	Back to Divertion Add Another Person to My Circle	Next

The public user will then show how they use the existing space by pin-dropping the places they would show their family and friends, places they would like to visit alone, draw their typical path through the site, and list the activities they do there currently. These approaches will provide practitioners with valuable spatial and contextual information of the existing site's qualitative condition. Lastly, the user will explain places that need improvement on the project site. They will also have the opportunity to add additional information and ask questions directly to the project team.



Following the previous section, the public user will now show what they would like to see on site. This section includes exercises guiding the user to explain their favorite civic spaces and make a collection of things they would like to see on the project site.

This critical participatory section empowers the public user to brainstorm with the practitioners and inform decisions.



What are your favorite civic spaces outside of this neighborhood?

Hint: What makes these places special? For example: I love the central plaza in downtown Copenhagen becasue of its foot traffic, the fountain where you can sit by, and lots of shops and restaurants around it. Drop a pin in anyplaces around the world.



What are your favorite civic spaces outside of this neighborhood?





I agree my comment will be used as indicated in th and conditions.





Hint: What are the runctions, elements, or ivities you would like to see here? For example: I want to see water features, lightings in this plaza. Make a collage!



If we propose a new building on site, where do you think it should be?

Dur design team thinks a community cent te will increase the chances of social inter id provide health benefits in thie neighbor We want to bear your thoughts. Do you as

e your comment here!



Next

RECOMMENDATION FOR NEXT STEPS

This project's final app design is not a catch-all product. The app is intended for youth and working-age populations that are deemed underrepresented in conventional engagement methods.

While a mobile app for engagement provides greater access to a broader audience, disparities in digital access and literacy should not be ignored. As a next step, a "convert to SMS (Short Message Service)" option from this app would be beneficial to reach audiences unfamiliar with mobile app platforms.

To build on this app, below are a few recommendations from the author:

- 1. Plan and execute a feedback loop to build trust with the engaged population.
 - What is the objective of this engagement exercise?
 - What are the anticipated outcomes?
 - What did practitioners do with the public inputs from the engagement exercise?

This final section completes the feedback loop and provides a base for further discussion amongst the practitioners and the public.



2. Use simple messaging and authentic facilitation questions to attract and retain community interest.

It's also worthwhile to emphasize that depending on each project context, an inclusive and equitable, and high-participatory-level engagement process that captures all different profiles of stakeholders, will require the usage of multiple avenues of tools, both in-person and online. This project aims to add to existing engagement tools and provide insights into engaging with underrepresented populations. It is the author's hope that this design project-based public engagement tool will empower high-level public particiaption and help bridge the gap between listening, learning, and informing design decisions

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