Innovative Civic and Community Engagement Tools

March 20, 2025
Raleigh, NC

# The National Civic League: A long history of innovation...

Founded in 1894 by Teddy Roosevelt, Louis Brandeis, Frederick Law Olmsted, and Mary Munford, NCL established the Model City Charter, city manager form of government, and other reforms to fight corruption, end patronage, and advance public health.

The mission of the National Civic League is to advance civic engagement to create equitable, thriving communities through key programs: community assistance, awards and events, research and publications.

Learning Objectives

*1. How to Empower the Public with Citizens'
Assemblies*

*2. How to Improve Public Engagement in Official
Meetings*

*3. How to Broaden Participation at the
Neighborhood and Community Level*

Parallel to
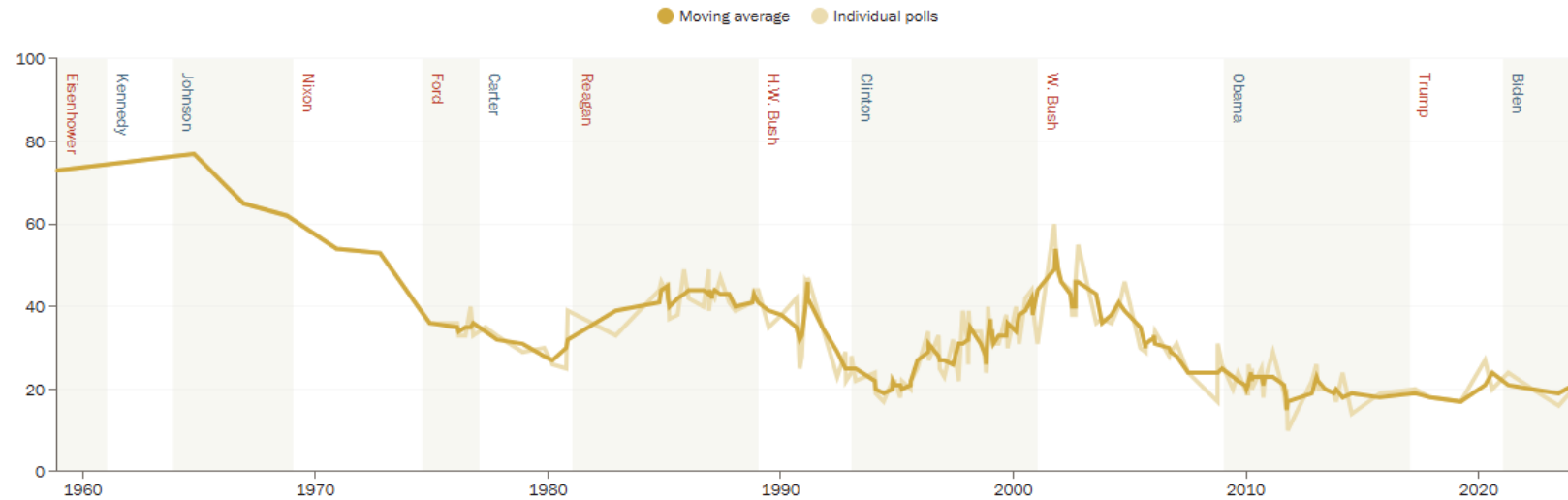government

In
government

In community
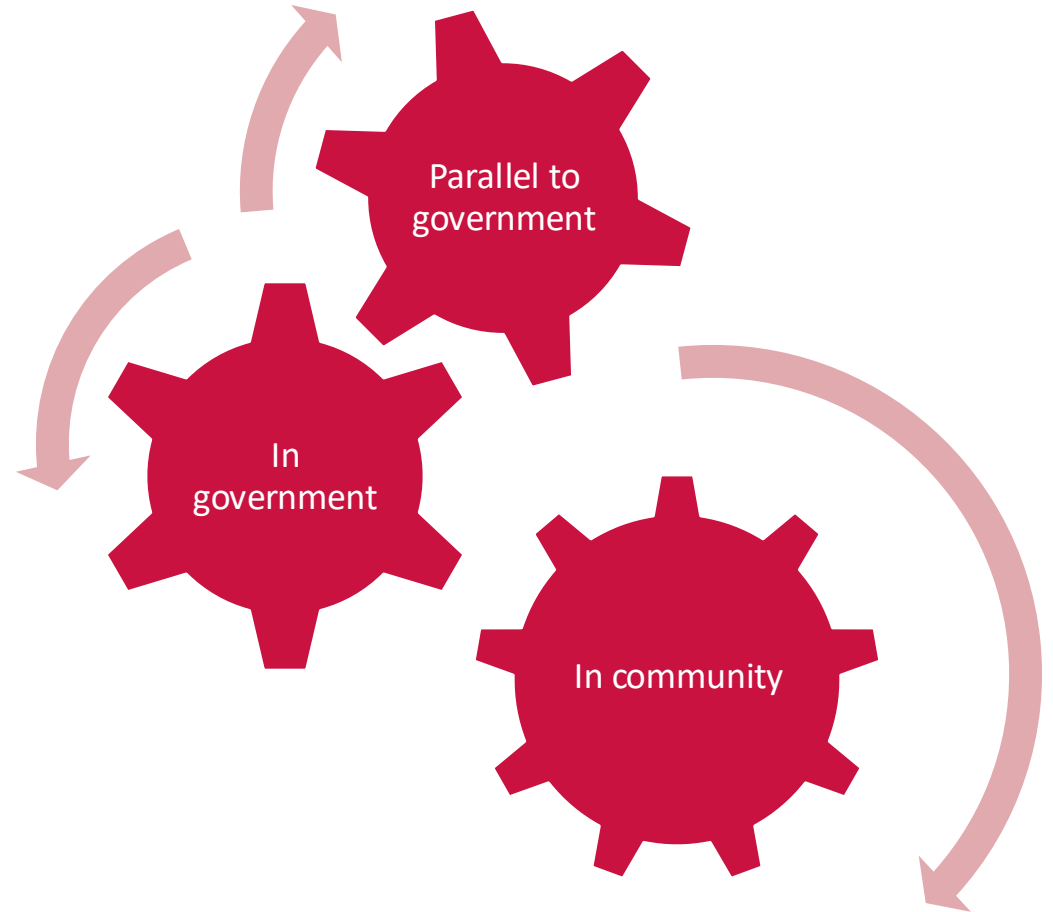
The Problem of Distrust in Government

Public Trust in Government: 1958-2024

Public trust in the federal government, which has been low for decades, has increased modestly since 2023. As of April 2024, 22% of Americans say they trust the government in Washington to do what is right "just about always" (2%) or "most of the time" (21%). Last year, 16% said they trusted the government just about always or most of the time, which was among the lowest measures in nearly seven decades of polling.

Public trust in government near historic lows

% who say they trust the government to do what is right just about always/most of the time

Moving average   Individual polls

Eisenhower | Kennedy | Johnson | Nixon | Ford | Carter | Reagan | H.W. Bush | Clinton | W. Bush | Obama | Trump | Biden

Sources: Pew Research Center, National Election Studies, Gallup, ABC/Washington Post, CBS/New York Times, and CNN surveys.
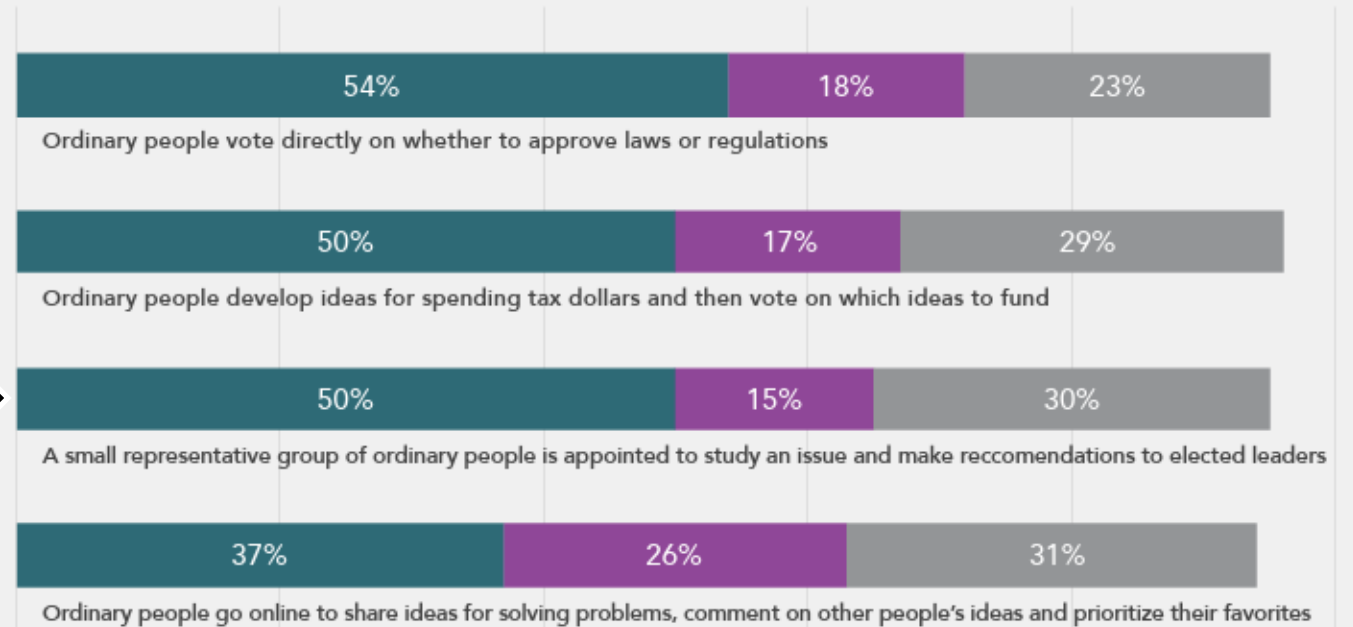
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

What Type of Participation Do People Want?

About half of Americans say their local government should implement systems to give people more decision-making power.

Figure 11. Percent of Americans who say their local government should or should not implement each of the following systems or that they are not sure, 2019 survey:

■ Local government should implement   ■ Local government should not implement   ■ Not sure

| 54% | 18% | 23% |
Ordinary people vote directly on whether to approve laws or regulations

| 50% | 17% | 29% |
Ordinary people develop ideas for spending tax dollars and then vote on which ideas to fund

| 50% | 15% | 30% |
A small representative group of ordinary people is appointed to study an issue and make reccomendations to elected leaders

| 37% | 26% | 31% |
Ordinary people go online to share ideas for solving problems, comment on other people's ideas and prioritize their favorites
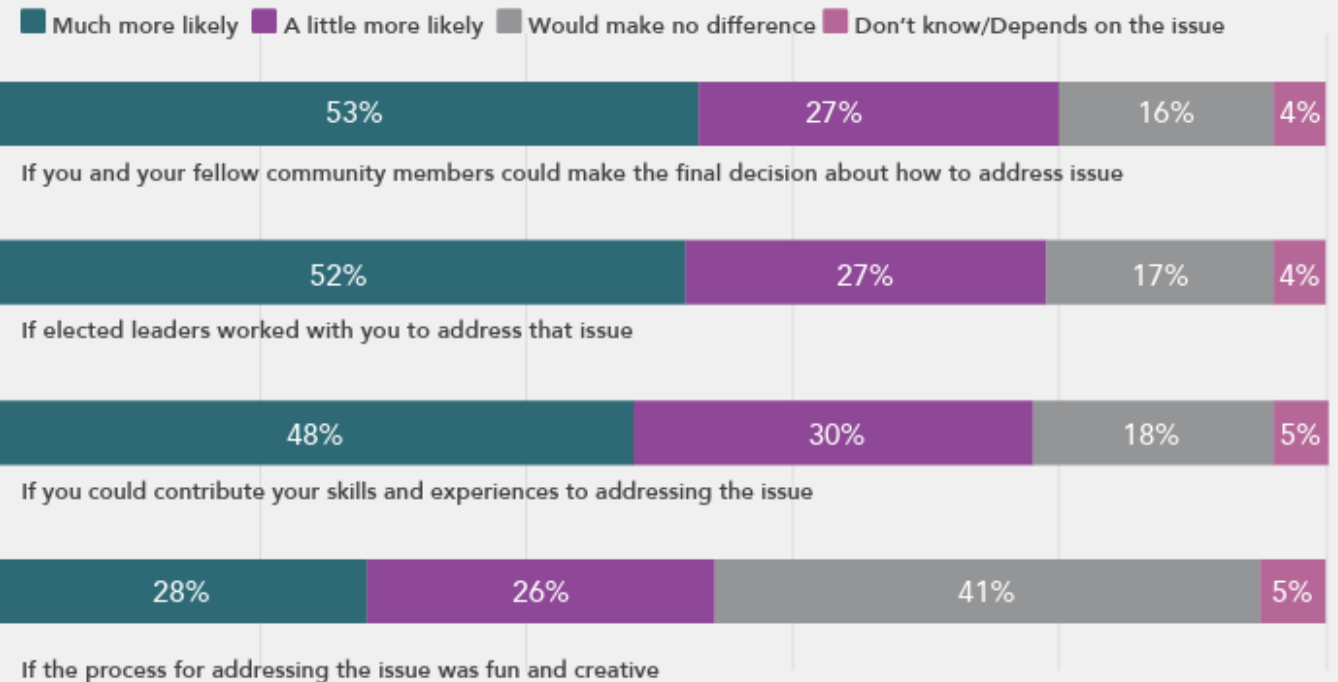
Base: All respondents, N=1,000.

Numbers do not add up to 100 percent owing to the 5 percent of respondents who either refused the question or responded "Depends" or "My local government already does this" and are not represented in the figure.

Source: Yankelovich Democracy Monitor, 2020

Would this Make a Difference?

People would be more likely to get involved in local issues if they had decision-making power.

Figure 12. When there is an issue in their local community that they feel needs to be addressed, percent who say how each of the following would impact their likelihood to get involved, 2019 survey:

■ Much more likely ■ A little more likely ■ Would make no difference ■ Don't know/Depends on the issue

	Much more likely	A little more likely	Would make no difference	Don't know/Depends on the issue
If you and your fellow community members could make the final decision about how to address issue	53%	27%	16%	4%
If elected leaders worked with you to address that issue	52%	27%	17%	4%
If you could contribute your skills and experiences to addressing the issue	48%	30%	18%	5%
If the process for addressing the issue was fun and creative	28%	26%	41%	5%

Base: All respondents, N=1,000.

Source: Yankelovich Democracy Monitor, 2020

What is a Citizens' Assembly?

A citizens', civic, or community assembly is a representative group of residents tasked with learning, deliberating, and making recommendations to a formal authority on a policy issue.

Petaluma, CA (2022)

How are People Selected?

Residents in a community receive a letter in the mail to participate and register their information online.

Participants are selected randomly to fill quotas based on relevant local census data and context, most commonly using age, gender, race, and geography as selection criteria, and sometimes also using education, income, or stances on political issues.

The 'civic lottery' outcome is a representative sample of the community.

CONNECTING TO PARLIAMENT

You are invited to attend a deliberative town hall event about the issue of **youth representation** and **lowering the voting age**.

WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

The average age of representatives in the Parliament of Australia is 52. This means a generational gap between elected officials and young people who are between the ages of 15-30 years old. This group of elected officials make decisions that will have impact for decades to come.

Climate change is the most pressing example – the lack of action by the current Parliament will impact young people for the rest of their lives. This is true for other issues too including the prospects of receiving quality education, having good and secure jobs, or buying a home.
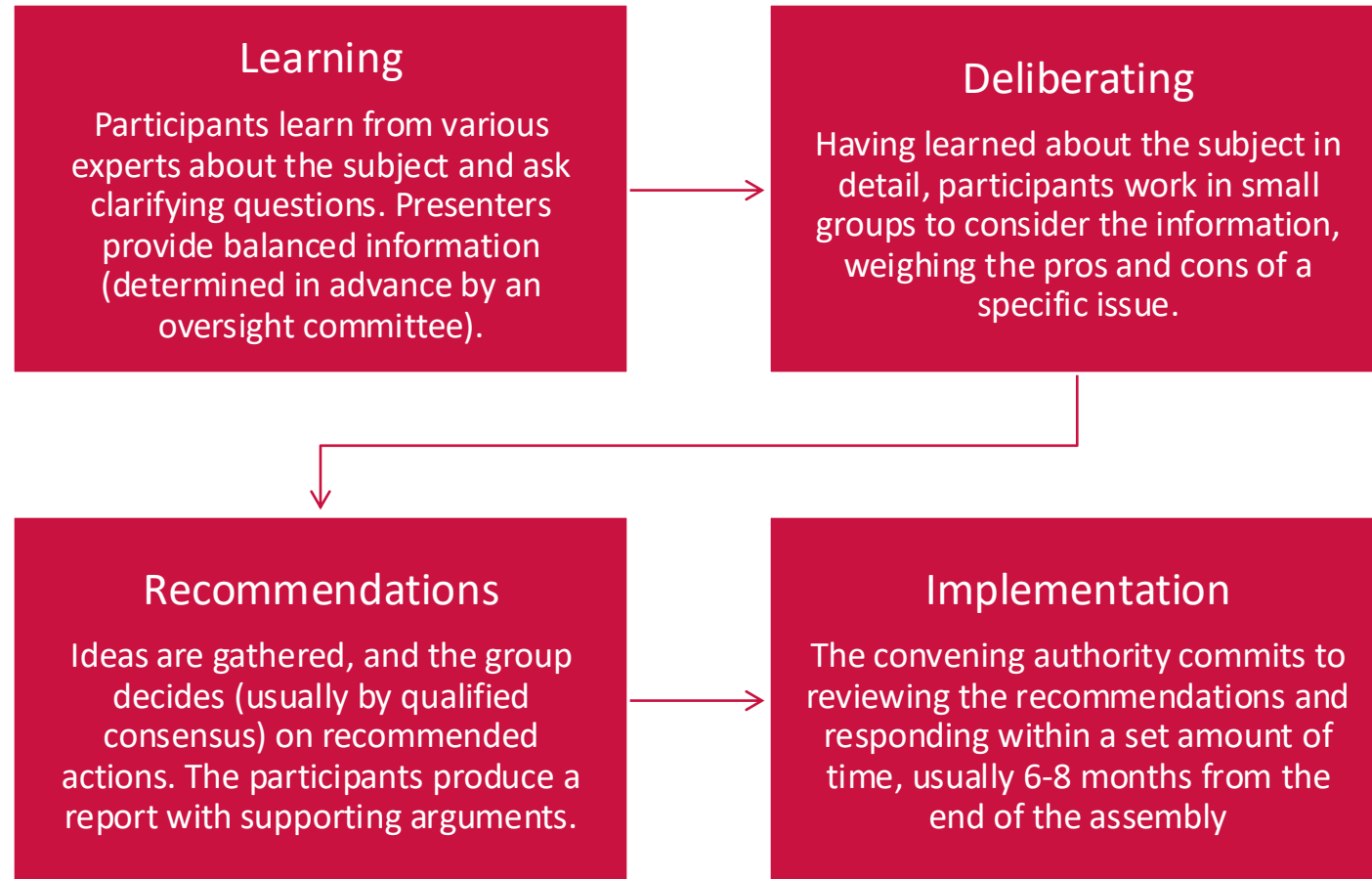
It is important to include young people in conversations around the issues that affect them directly.

How can we improve the inclusion and representation of young people in Australian politics?

What are the possible reform pathways for this? Should we lower the voting age and allow people under the age of 18 to vote?

Should we think about different ways of making Members of Parliament better representatives of youth and their interests?

Panelot (panel selection by lot) is a not-for-profit system for randomly selecting citizens' panels in a way that is representative of the population and fair to volunteers.

Step 1: Compute a Civic Lottery
Generate a fair distribution over panels, each of which satisfies your representation criteria.

Step 2: Draw a Panel
Select a single panel from a precomputed civic lottery.

What are the Stages?

Learning

Participants learn from various experts about the subject and ask clarifying questions. Presenters provide balanced information (determined in advance by an oversight committee).

Deliberating

Having learned about the subject in detail, participants work in small groups to consider the information, weighing the pros and cons of a specific issue.

Recommendations

Ideas are gathered, and the group decides (usually by qualified consensus) on recommended actions. The participants produce a report with supporting arguments.

Implementation

The convening authority commits to reviewing the recommendations and responding within a set amount of time, usually 6-8 months from the end of the assembly

Pros vs Cons of Citizens' Assemblies

Pro

Time: Decisions are made by reasoned arguments, informed by hours of learning

Representation: Participants encounter people from all walks of life

Empowerment: The public makes their own decisions without political influence

Con

Cost: Citizens' Assemblies will range based on the group size (which includes stipends). General costs are $250k+

Political Will: If a referendum doesn't determine decisions, it's up to politicians to determine implementation.

Rarity: Citizens' Assemblies can tend to be one-off experiences despite their success.

Why Use A Citizens' Assembly?

01
To include the public. Examine broad policies and issues that are politically deadlocked or don't have a clear answer.

02
To make assessments. Weigh policy options through two-way communication and make recommendations that are collectively agreed upon.

03
To change opinions and build trust. We learn what the public thinks and observe new ways of thinking about issues, people and institutions.

Transforming Public Attitudes

Democratic innovation:
- Mini-public
- Participatory process
- Referendum or citizens' initiative

Attitudes:
- Policy attitudes
- Political attitudes
- Process attitudes

Behaviour:
- Political participation
- Civic engagement

Capabilities:
- Knowledge
- Internal efficacy
- Reasoning skills
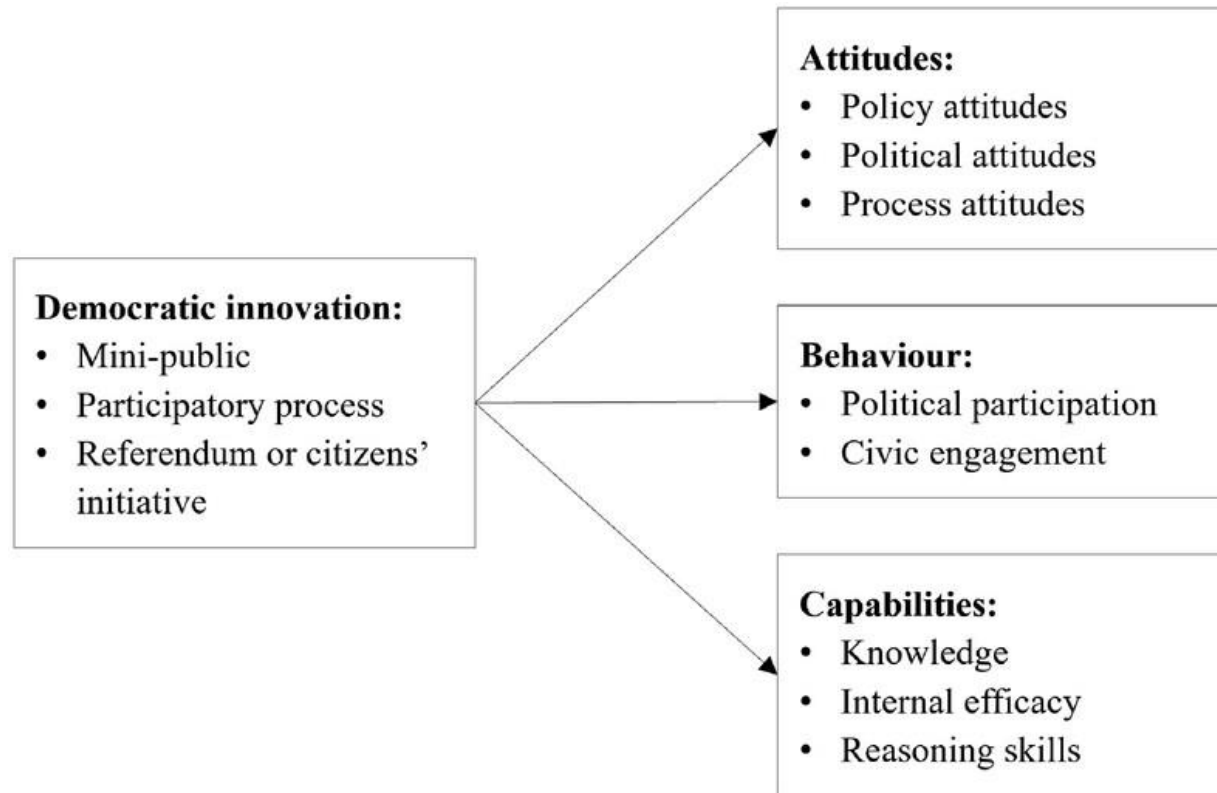
"A meta-analysis of the effects of democratic innovations on participants' attitudes, behaviour and capabilities."

Examples

Place	Timeframe	Size	Cost	Issue	Outcome
Petaluma, CA	90 hours (May-July 2022)	36	$425,000	How to redevelop 55-acre Fairgrounds	Ranked 120 site use options In 2024, Gov't asking the community to rank top 4 priorities
Deschutes County, Bend OR	4.5 days of deliberation	30 (from 12.5k residents) – 250 hand delivered	$250,000	Youth Homelessness	23 recommendations supported by 75%
British Columbia	1 year (2003/4)	160 members	$5.5 million CAD	Electoral Reform	57% -Yes (60% required to pass) (2005)
Ireland	5 months (2016-7)	100 members	$2 million euros	Abortion	66.4% approval, repealing 8th Amendment (2018)

Q & A

5-minutes

Roundtable Discussion (20mins)

Questions

1. What are your general thoughts on having a group of residents randomly selected based on diverse demographics come together to make recommendations on an issue for a government to implement? Would giving the public more opportunities to make policy decisions build more trust in government *and* between people?

2. Would you personally want to participate in one? Do you think this model offers something different and relevant from what you've experienced?

3. What issues do you think are suitable for your community to use civic assemblies?

The Problem of Contentious Public Meetings

/ Across the country, constituents are grilling their Republican members of Congress — and the heated exchanges are going viral online.

West Hartford's Board of Ed reverses public comment policy to allow non-agenda speakers at all meetings

Idaho town hall meeting turns chaotic after woman is forcibly removed for shouting at speakers

This council is so unpopular it can't hold meetings in public

City of Casey ratepayers have slammed their council's decision to ban the public from attending in person their monthly meeting, the move coming after police we called in to last month's event amid ratepayer fury over a slew of local laws.

Public Comment	Sunshine/Open Meeting Laws, Rules of Procedure etc.
1. An official body (city council, school board, commission) holds a public comment period part of a meeting agenda. 2. Broadcasted live 3. People sign up to speak 4. The public can have 2 or 3 minutes to speak to members 5. The public use a microphone/podium and the members are on a dais 6. Sometimes written submissions are allowed 7. No immediate response	1. Meetings of quorum (3 or more) where business is being discussed. 2. Meetings where notice is required. 3. Meetings with minutes. 4. Innovations allowable on recommendation by the Chair – allowable by Rules of Procedure • Ex. "Study sessions will be open to the public; however, there will be no public participation unless specifically requested by the Chair." 5. Not included are quasi-judicial items which require conduct in specific hearings

Public Comment & Meeting Laws 101

Asynchronous Opportunities

📅 City Council Study Session Meeting

Virtual

2 items · **Mon, Mar 4, 2024 at 7:00pm**

⬇ Download Packet

Information

Public Meeting Video

Agenda

Items

Item 1 · Call to Order

Item 2 · Roll Call

Item 3 · Statement of Conflict of Interest

Item 4 · Separated Bike Lane Program In Lakewood   `39`

Item 5 · Metro Districts   `1`

Item 6 · Adjournment

🕐 Pending · Agenda item 1 of 2

Item 4 - Separated Bike Lane Program In Lakewood

Files

📄 Staff Memo   (0.09 MB)   ⌄

📄 SBL Program Overview_March 2024   (1.82 MB)   ⌄

Public Comments

Again James Ward · Mar 4, 2024 · 8:17pm

A big issue on this topic that I feel needs to be addressed is restricted vehicle lane width. Why I bring this up for discussion is not the 13ft to 11ft change but the 11ft to 9ft restriction. The big reason is commercial motor vehicle usage. Garrison is a primary route for emergency vehicles, even has a fire station located on the route. Crazy to think you want to restrict lane with to the fire engine, ambulance and ladder truck that literally drive this many time on a daily basis. Section 5 in the MUTCD says 9ft lane width on low volume, low speed roadways. I feel you should definitely become the trend setter knowing Section 6 of the same Federal Traffic Control manual will state 10ft width SHALL be used when larger volumes and higher speeds are involved. You got to compare apples to apples, Denver vs Lakewood, the Denver bike lanes with separation are on lower volume roadways under 35mph, your example even showed Denver with 25mph signs by the bike lane. So you have expected CMV travel, reduce lane widths and non typical traffic measures in place it's just a matter of time till the real problem happens within this area. Maybe Lakewood should just restrict CMV travel, restrict fire trucks and have them use alternate routes and add speed bumps.

6 / 10 Councilors have viewed this comment

Contents

Resources

Public Comments

Two-Way Dialogue: Reformatting Meeting Interactions at Study Sessions

1. **No Dais / No Mic**
2. 9 City Council Members & 20 residents around one table
3. Learning component from staff: economic vitality
4. Breakouts – 2 Council Members per table
5. Report out
6. Within meeting laws
7. First of its Kind!

What We Heard from Participants

Better overall rating of meeting
- 47.9% to 100% 'good rating'

Less 'usual suspects' attending
- 14% to 54.5% first time attending

Better interactions/civil dialogue
- 44% to 80%

Feeling included sooner
- 40% agree / 20% strongly agree

I really enjoyed being able to have a conversation with people from different points of view and with different experiences. It was an interesting and dynamic dialogue. Listening to the final report it was good to feel heard in the quotes made by city council representatives. Thank you.

-Resident

The chance to listen to community members conversations, really listen. Not react or respond.

-Council member

Casual conversation led to less tense hot topics. It seemed to allow everyone to feel heard even when opinions differed.

-Staff

LESSON

Many people at public meetings are "performing" for one another, not expecting to be heard by officials

Open meeting laws allow more innovation than people realize

Can't just change format: need to engage more people and a wider variety of people

Most people want change; a small, vocal minority does not

Public Meetings help to understand:
What are the civic opportunities available?

THE FOURTH SENATE MASHINANI TO BE HELD IN BUSIA COUNTY

Going to the People: Rotating Spaces

City Charters and Civic Infrastructure: Their Process and Their Contents

National Civic League
Model City Charter
9th edition 2021

Modernizing the Model City Charter:
Enhancing Equity, Engagement and Effectiveness
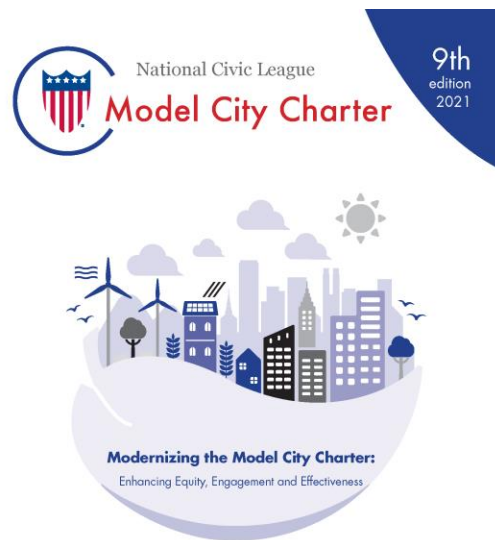
A Publication of the National Civic League

- Defining the authority and role of participatory deliberative bodies within the charter framework

Civic lottery

Citizens' Assembly
- 100 Members
- 16 years +
- Residents of Paris
- 1 year mandate

Current Affairs Questions + Vœux
Evaluation Mission
Local Bill of Citizens' Jury

Chooses issue

Local Bill Proposal

Citizens' Jury
17 Members

Paris Council
163 Councillors

Min. 2 meetings/year in plenary Working group meetings regularly, at interval determined by members

Chooses theme of Paris **Participatory Budgeting**

Required to provide **written response** at time of submission and one year later

Secretariat
Full-time council staff devoted to organisation of CA and CJs

Oversight committee
- Representatives of CA
- Representative from each political party
- 4 deliberation experts

Q & A

5-minutes

Roundtable Discussion (20mins)

Questions

1. What are your experiences with public comment periods? How would you like to see public participation happen in official meetings?

2. Would providing different types of opportunities within government processes encourage diverse people to be involved in decision-making? What are some ways to strengthen and renovate existing processes in Raleigh City governance to build more public trust?

3. What do you think about using digital tools and platforms to support asynchronous participation in government processes?

The Problem of Civic (Dis)Connections in Neighborhoods
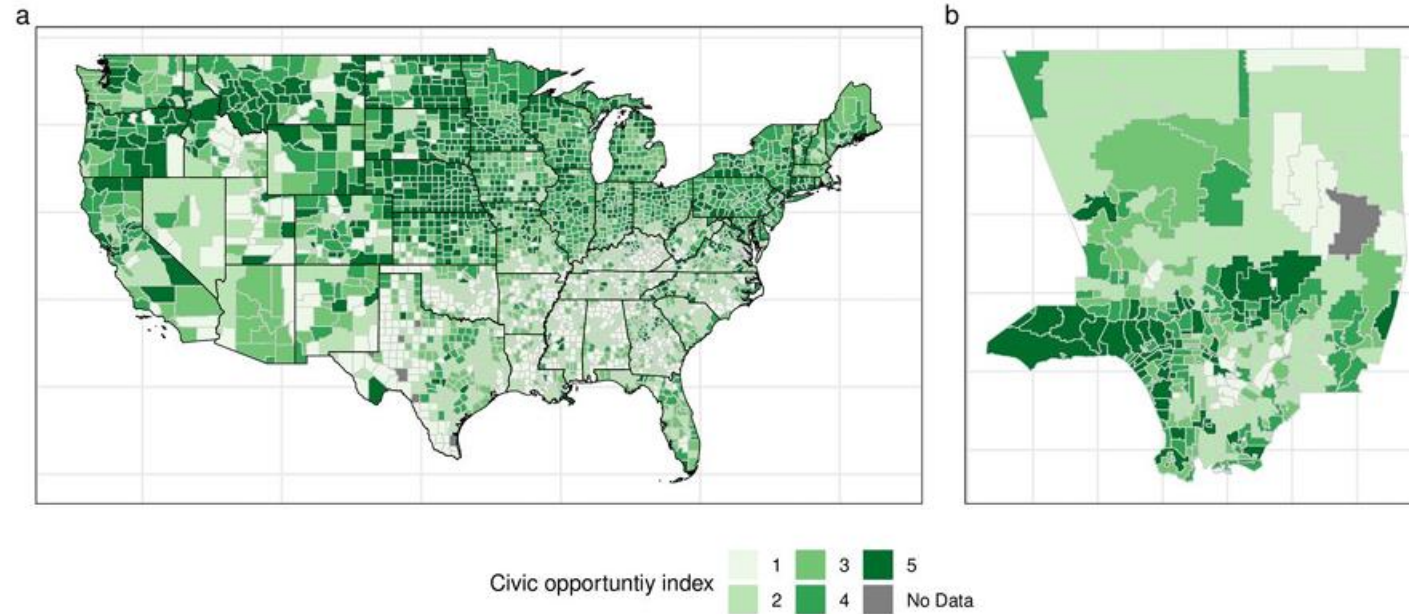
Figure 1: The Geography of Civic Opportunity in the United States. The Civic Opportunity Index ranks counties based on their cumulative civic opportunity scores per capita. Each civic opportunity score represents the range of opportunities (0-1) provided by an organization. The index divides the counties of the continental United States (Panel A) or zip codes of Los Angeles county (Panel B) into five grades: from 1 (low civic opportunity, shaded in white) to 5 (high civic opportunity, shaded in green).

Mapping Healthy Democracy

Go to:

healthydemocracymap.org

Categories of Work to Promote Healthy Democracy

Civic Associations

Civic Education / Learning

Civic Media

Civic Research

Civic Technology

Connecting Across Differences

Deliberative, Participatory & Direct Democracy

Electoral Reform

Faith-Based Efforts

Organizing & Advocacy

Service & Volunteerism

Voter Engagement

Responsive Governance

Funders

VIEWING   All Categories

Use the following grid to take an inventory of some of the civic opportunities listed for **PARTICIPATE:**

Civic Opportunity	We don't have this and don't want it	We would like this but don't have it yet	We're working on creating this	We have it! (though we may need to expand it)
Voting directly on issues				
Voter education and get-out-the-vote programs				
Voting access and integrity				
Deliberative public meetings				
Citizen assemblies and survey panels				
Neighborhood associations, councils, and online networks				
Participatory budgeting processes				
Volunteering opportunities				
Fundraising campaigns and crowdfunding processes				
Small grant programs and competitions				
Problem-reporting and feedback opportunities				
Citizen assessments				
Placemaking and user-centered design opportunities				
Voting system reforms				

Mapping Your Community's Civic Opportunities

What are some elements of civic infrastructure?

National Civic League
Rhode Island
Action Guide for Improving Civic Health
2024

Welcome To
RHODE ISLAND
The Ocean State

Tools and strategies for assessing and improving civic health, opportunities, and infrastructure in Rhode Island, with key examples

Democracy Innovation · National Civic League · RHODE ISLAND FOUNDATION

Table of Contents

Formal Supports and Mechanisms for Community Decision-Making

The Federation of Calgary Communities supports over 230 non-profits, including Calgary's 150+ community associations. It provides educational workshops, resources, and advocacy to enhance community engagement and development.

RESOURCE LIBRARY

We've compiled helpful and essential information on common subjects related to community-based organizations.

Our member-only online resource library has hundreds of carefully selected templates, guides and tip sheets on a variety of topics and areas of interest.

LEARN MORE

Governance	Urban Planning	Financial Management	Community Engagement
Employees & Volunteers	Compliance	Communications	Risk Management
Facilities	Fundraising	Crime & Safety	Translated Resources
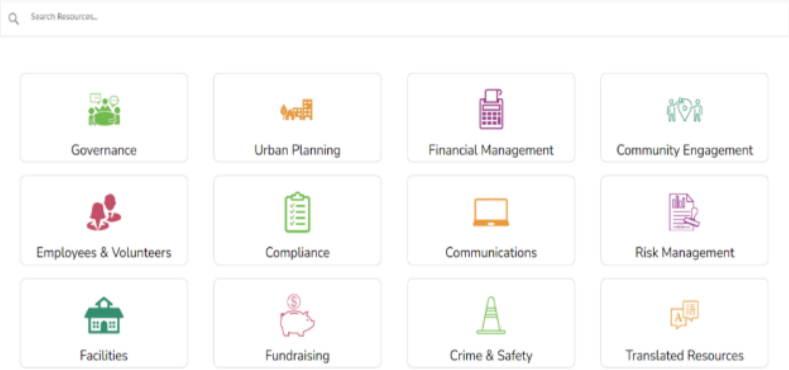
We build the capacity of volunteer-led nonprofits in Calgary and surrounding area by supporting passionate people who give back to their community, no matter the cause. Through our growing network of community-based organizations, we support our member's work in a variety of sectors, including arts, culture, education, the environment, recreation, crime prevention, social services and Community Associations.

Our Vision: We are cultivating a network of nonprofit organizations that are able to thrive, collaborate, and make an impact on their communities

Our Mission: We build the capacity of volunteer-run organizations by delivering resources, workshops and professional services. Through our work, people gain the skills to guide their organizations with confidence and clarity.

Community | Leadership | Inclusion | Commitment | Volunteerism | Integrity

Who we support

156 Community Associations

86 Community-based organizations

13 Resident Associations

7 Rural Community Associations

Sub-Municipal Governance

Community Boards: New York City's 59 community districts have a Community Board composed of up to 50 volunteer members appointed by the borough president (elected by the public), with half nominated by City Council members representing the district. These boards serve in an advisory capacity on land use, zoning, and the city budget process. They hold regular public meetings where residents can voice concerns and provide input on neighborhood issues.

99 neighborhood councils in Los Angeles – elected, 30-40K funds to distribute. The annual Council of Neighborhoods convene to learn and network.

Digital Crowdsourcing
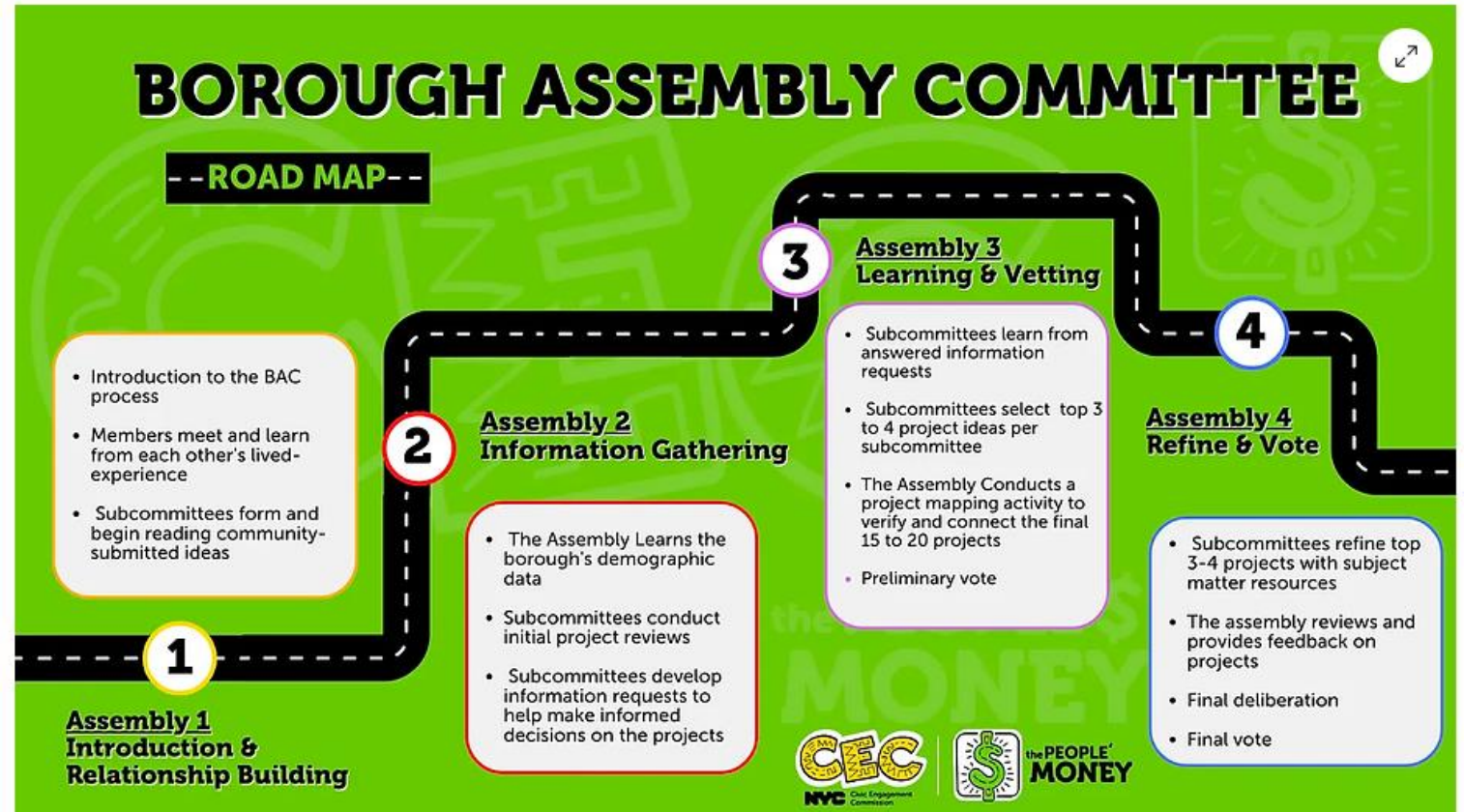
Pol.is, Decidim are open-source tools to crowd source input, have people rank and discuss ideas

Durham talks in partnership with Cortico records small group conversations

Mentimeter or Slido allow live polling
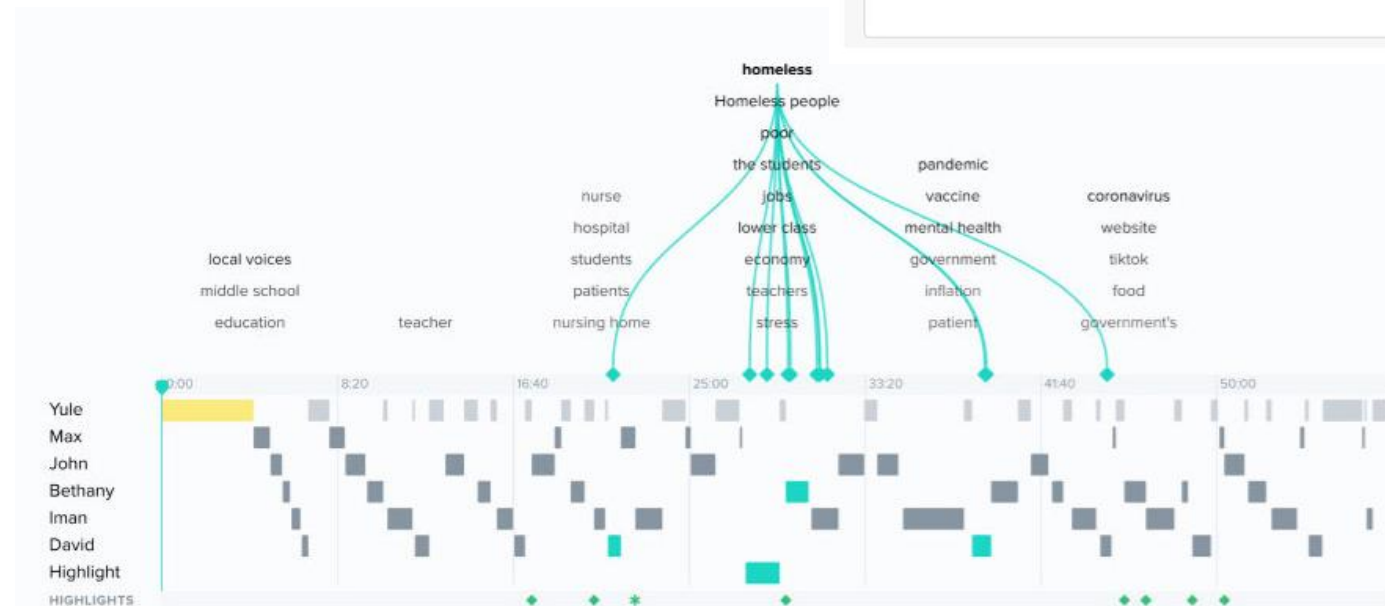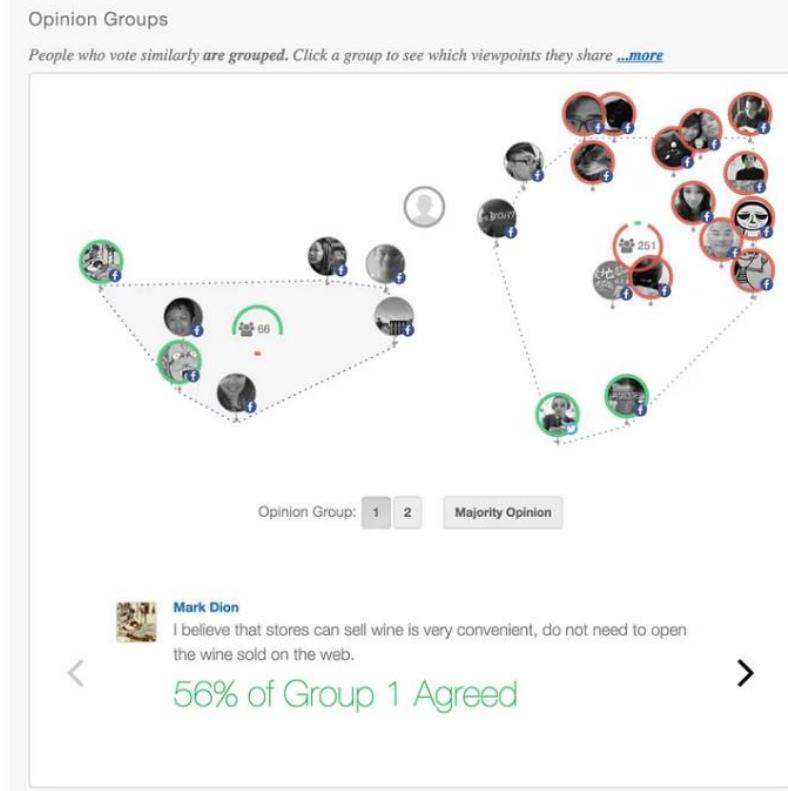
Tools that Community Groups Are Using to Engage the Community

Participatory documentaries of lived experiences

Virtual reality with seniors on park space redevelopment

Democratic governance and ownership of land and housing – community land trusts

Mutual aid hotlines and online marketplaces

1. **A web-browser-based VR design platform** enabling live interaction between multi-users (up to 100 CAS) building on the gaming platform three.JS;

2. **A headset-based VR visualization platform** enabling users to review the latest collective design in 360 degrees, complete with interactive viewing and feedback interactions. This was created via Yulio and could be viewed via a mobile/tablet device and web browser.

Seeking Safety

Seeking Safety
Agincourt Community Services Association (ACSA)
The Safety Ambassadors at the Dorset Park Hub demonstrate the power of resident-led social change. Discover how they transformed their neighbourhood and inspired their community.

Our hotline is active from 10am-4pm, 7 days a week at 647-873-2230.

COMMUNITY OWNED 36 PROTECTED

Q & A

5-minutes

Roundtable Discussion (20mins)

Questions

1. Are there ways to strengthen networks of community organizations in Raleigh, and what would that look like? What organizations should we include on the Map?

2. How would you create bottom-up decision-making processes? How would you innovate community advisory councils?

3. How can your organization use digital tools, and in what ways might you want to focus on broadening participation to other groups of people that are harder to reach?

Group Reports

What are the top 3 things your group discussed?

What are some possible collaborative efforts for the community to work on going forward?

Apply to be an All-America City in 2026: Open Theme/America 250 (Raleigh last won in 1975)

2025 All-America City Award
Strengthening Environmental Sustainability through Inclusive Community Engagement

Some projects adhering to this year's theme include:

- Engagement strategies such as appreciative inquiry, citizen commissions, and participatory planning, that empower communities in climate action planning.
- Transportation campaigns that engage residents in efforts to increase biking, walking, carpooling, and public transit use.
- Community-based workforce development programs focused on increasing and ensuring equitable access to green jobs.
- Neighborhood-based climate resilience projects.
- Enhancing and streamlining climate action efforts through technology and AI solutions.
- Community forums on climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies.
- Climate action task forces to develop localized action plans.
- Working with schools to increase shared awareness and understanding of climate change impacts.
- Raising climate change awareness through the arts and entertainment.
- Natural disaster preparedness planning that involves residents in collective action.

Important Dates:

June 2024-May 2025: AAC Webinar Series

March 6, 2025: Applications Due

March 2025: Finalists Announced

March-June 2025: Competition Preparation

June 27-29, 2025: AAC Competition & Event in Denver, CO

Link: bit.ly/raleighscorecard

Raleigh Scorecard Live Poll

Thank You!

Contact:

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