

The Power of Crowdsourcing for Citizen Engagement:

Effective citizen engagement is demanded, and increasingly mandated, by federal, state and regional governments and other public sector organizations to help ensure that plans, policies and programs reflect the needs and priorities of those stakeholders. **Crowdsourcing is the most dramatic improvement in citizen and stakeholder engagement in decades.** Crowdsourcing goes beyond forums and surveys by providing an interactive online process, focused on specific objectives, that guides collaboration and innovation, leading to desired input and outcomes.

Importantly, in times of tight budgets, **crowdsourcing reaches more people, more effectively, at less cost than traditional engagement methods.** Whether the need is citizen input for a new urban plan, public consultation during policy development, or a “grand challenge” to seek innovative solutions for social issues, crowdsourcing provides a highly accessible method of engagement that can lower the overall cost, while raising both the quality and quantity of participation.

Stronger engagement can lead to more satisfied citizens. Participants in well-designed crowdsourcing engagements report stronger connection as a result of having the opportunity to contribute in a meaningful way.

How Crowdsourcing works:

Crowdsourcing is a disciplined online process in which people who have a common interest or affiliation (such as citizens or other stakeholder groups) collaborate in an organized and positive way towards accomplishing specific objectives.

There are many different ways of structuring crowdsourcing engagements, but most use online technology and program moderation to guide the crowd through a process of submission, enhancement, review and selection of the best input.

One of the most common methods is a “collaborative” approach that poses questions to the “crowd” and enables people to submit ideas, which other participants can read, comment on, or make further suggestions. In this way, the ideas submitted are improved and enhanced based on the “wisdom of the crowd” (or in other words, the various experiences, knowledge, backgrounds and opinions of the participants). The crowd may be asked to rate submissions, which helps identify submissions the crowd thinks are most viable. These evolved ideas are now available for further consideration and potential implementation by the sponsoring organization. Another method keeps submissions private, but may allow people inside the organization to interact and collaborate with the submitters. This may be used when grants or prizes are to be awarded.

Crowdsourcing can also incorporate other types of online collaborative activities to provide a wider breadth of input and data of real value. Numerous studies show that “crowdsourced” input, ideas and solutions are often superior even to those from panels of experts.

Crowdsourcing engagements may span days, weeks, or months and many governments and agencies have found their crowdsourcing community and platform to be a powerful “on-demand” engagement mechanism that allows them to be far more flexible and reactive, without the high cost of up front planning each time. **Effective use of crowdsourcing over time can cut the overall costs of citizen engagement by as much as 50%.**

Applications for Public Sector Crowdsourcing

There are a variety of ways that governments and other public sector organizations can and should take advantage of the power of crowdsourcing. Specific examples include:

- **Understanding Needs:** Governments are in place to further the interests of its citizens, and must have the clearest possible understanding of citizens’ needs. The collaborative, interactive process of crowdsourcing allows drilling into issues at a deeper level for greater clarity.
- **Determining Priorities:** All issues can’t be tackled at once, priorities must be set and communicated. Crowdsourcing provides a more democratic way to help establish priorities, and understand *why* they are the top priorities to
- **Social Innovation:** Progress is being made on some of the world’s most pressing problems today because of crowdsourced solutions. Crowdsourcing opens up possibilities for solutions from anyone. It is being used effectively today by forward-thinking cities and government agencies around the world, but we’ve only just scratched the surface of the opportunity to gain from crowdsourcing for social good.
- **Grand Challenges:** This type of crowdsourcing is typically used when a government, agency or foundation wants to grant or invest anywhere from thousands to millions of dollars to help test and scale promising new ideas to solve problems or drive innovation.

How GoodCrowds can help:

The benefits of crowdsourcing can be significant, but it takes planning and strategy to do it right. Citizen engagements have their own unique requirements: Who are the right participants? What are the right topics? What technology is right for the engagement? How long should the engagement be? What results can be expected?

GoodCrowds will work with you to determine the right approach for your organization, and answer all of these questions. We have worked with governments and public sector organizations around the world to conceptualize, design and implement effective crowdsourcing programs, using many different crowdsourcing methods from collaborative to Grand Challenges. We will help ensure that your engagements are successful from the get-go by sharing our knowledge of best practices, and make certain of the best use of your valuable budget.

For more information, please email info@goodcrowds.com, or visit www.goodcrowds.com