# 21st Century Practitioner's Guide to Community Engagement

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# Contents

# About this Guide

This guide is designed for community engagement professionals and teams to help kick start their journey in digital engagement using Bang the Table's community engagement platform, EngagementHQ.

It contains a wide range of resources – from strategies for planning your engagement to choosing the right digital engagement tools to promote your consultation – to help you get the best possible value out of EngagementHQ.

Use this guide to help get you started, brush up on best practice methods, or share with colleagues new to digital engagement.

# Why we Engage Online

Where traditional, face-to-face engagement places limitations on participation, online community engagement enables more people to have their say, at their convenience.

A dedicated digital engagement space beyond the limitations of social media – with strident measures of data security – ensures everyone has safe access to make meaningful contributions to issues impacting their everyday life.

Online engagement in the planning stages of a project facilitates more focussed project outcomes. It can minimise budgets and, unlike traditional engagement methods, it provides greater opportunities to dive deeper into conversations beyond the immediate issue at hand. It also brings diverse groups together, including hard to reach communities, bringing marginalised voices into the conversation.

It also makes information security critical. EngagementHQ, our dedicated digital engagement system, ensures privacy and security operations head off the vulnerabilities and challenges open to open data, such as social media. In our mission to improve the quality of debate and level of community influence and involvement in public life, we continually assess data security to provide the community with accessible opportunities to learn about and contribute to public decisions that impact their everyday life.

# Key Benefits of Online Community Engagement

Online community engagement brings a myriad of added dimensions and benefits to decision making. Here are six key benefits to taking your conversations online:

### Engaging under-represented groups
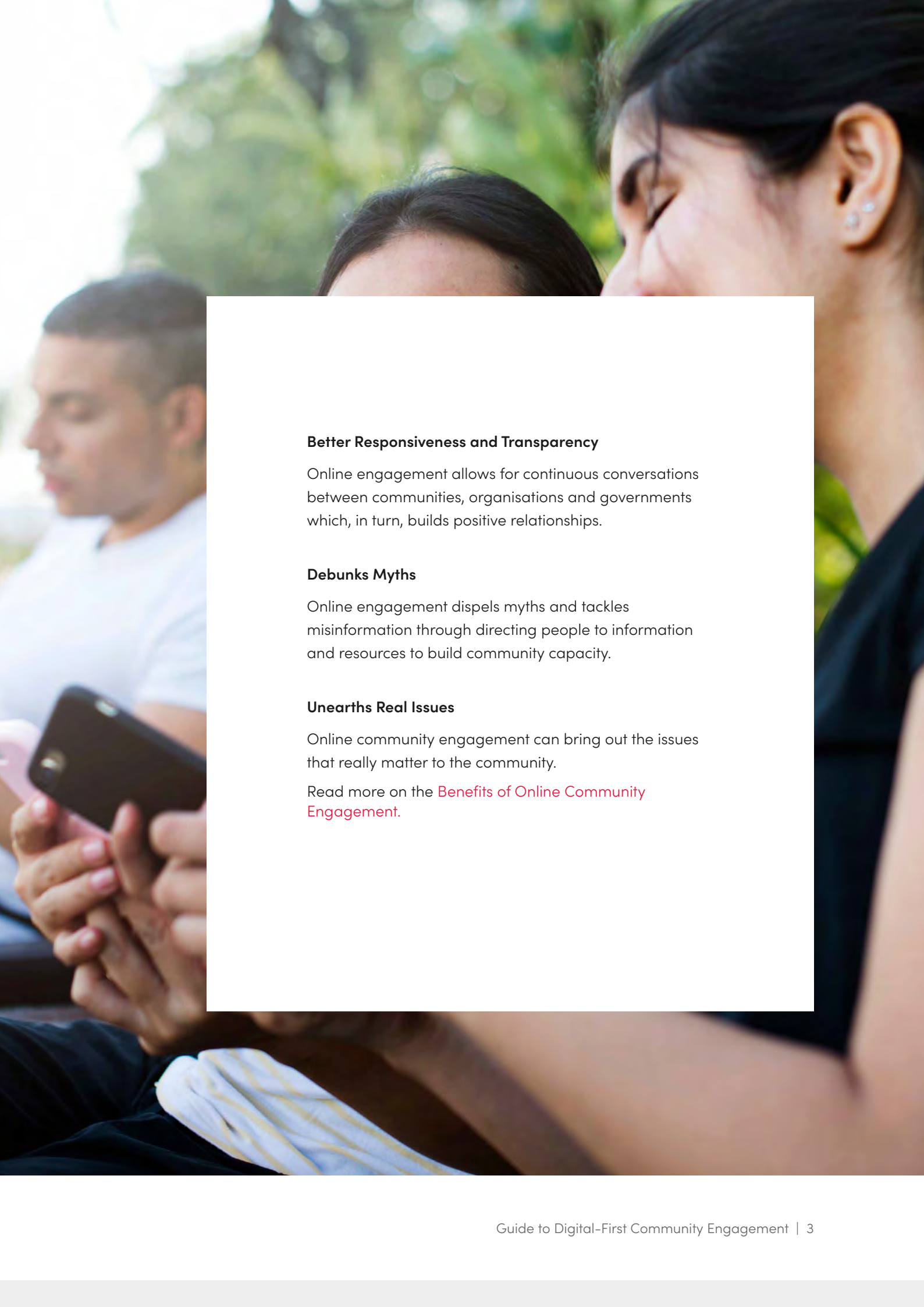
Online community engagement gives everyone a chance to be heard and builds greater social cohesion.

### Informed decision making

Making sure people have their say, and are listened to, and involving the people most affected, leads to decisions that are more likely to be legitimate.

### Community Ownership

Being able to have a say improves the implementation of decisions as it engenders a feeling of community ownership over project outcomes and visions for a community's future.

**Better Responsiveness and Transparency**

Online engagement allows for continuous conversations between communities, organisations and governments which, in turn, builds positive relationships.

**Debunks Myths**

Online engagement dispels myths and tackles misinformation through directing people to information and resources to build community capacity.

**Unearths Real Issues**

Online community engagement can bring out the issues that really matter to the community.

Read more on the Benefits of Online Community Engagement.

# What is Digital-First Community Engagement?

Digital-first engagement is a concept initially developed to challenge thinking around community engagement that is now gaining mainstream acceptance. Indeed, digital engagement techniques are incorporated into community engagement and consultation processes to reach audiences beyond the few who choose to attend face-to-face events. However, in part, they continue to be the poor cousin of traditional face-to-face engagement, especially where an online tool or survey is tacked on to an engagement process that is designed around in-person events.

Engagement practitioners increasingly accept that digital engagement tools provide a way to reach a wider audience for engagement. So why not design the process around the use of those tools? This doesn't have to mean less face-to-face engagement. It just means giving more emphasis to the method that most people will use to learn about and give input to the project.

Great digital-first engagement means thoughtful use of engagement tools; giving consideration to consistent usage across your organisation; using digital engagement to inspire greater attendance of face-to-face events and ensure you truly reach, and include, the broader community rather than just sectional interest groups. It allows for continuous conversations between communities, organisations and governments which, in turn, builds positive relationships.

Read more on Using a Digital First Community Engagement Approach.

# Ten Tips for Getting the Very Best Out of EngagementHQ

**1**    Build your online community quickly from day one.

**2**    Develop your project plan and process.

**3**    Choose the right feedback tools for the job.

**4**    Ask engaging questions.

**5**    Create engaging and informative content.

**6**    Keep your copy short, succinct and targeted to your audience.

**7**    Ensure your content meets accessibility requirements.

**8**    Promote your consultation extensively to maximise participation.

**9**    Always close the loop and provide feedback to participants.

**10**    Activate your community with a range of compelling projects.

# Six Foundations of Best-Practice Online Engagement

## 1 Know your promise to your community, and be honest about it.

The most important question you will need to ask when designing your engagement strategy is, "How much decision making power are we willing and able to hand over to our community of stakeholders?" Providing opportunities for genuine, meaningful feedback and transparency in decision making is essential for building an active, trusting community and strengthens relationships.

## 2 Use a blend of online and offline engagement strategies.

Approaching online and offline engagement on an equal footing has many evidence-based benefits. Thinking through how both strategies affect each other will ensure you maximise community participation and allow you to cross-check the results between methods, which is essential for effective outcomes.

## 3 Activate your community.

Ensure your community know that they can have their say on matters that impact their everyday lives. Utilise proactive communications and build a strong engagement brand to strengthen your online engagement community.

## 4 Provide accessible information

Ensure your project information is accessible to people with impaired vision, poor literacy, or to people from culturally diverse backgrounds. Include a rich variety of materials and resources in different formats that are easily digestible. This will maximise the breadth and depth of your communities' understanding of your engagement project.

## 5 Build meaningful and trusting relationships

Building meaningful and trusting relationships with your community is essential to getting the engagement outcomes required for your project. By ensuring you demonstrate your ability to listen, and provide transparent information about your participation outcomes, you will strengthen these relationships.

Active listening, thanking participants and keeping your community up-to-date, will ensure solid foundations and make your continuous engagement activities easier and help drive participation.

## 6 Be clear about your objectives and time frames

Whether working online or offline, it's important to be clear about what you are trying to achieve. In an online space, it's crucial to use concise, active communication. State precisely what you are doing – and when – within a few short sentences using direct language. You need to provide your community with a compelling reason to give up their time to let you know what they think of your project.

# Digital-First Engagement Methodology

A good digital-first engagement methodology will almost always be informed by an engagement plan which outlines engagement objectives, such as the extent to which you are trying to build capacity, strengthen relationships or make a decision. It is also influenced by limitations, negotiables, associated risks and organisational commitment to engaging stakeholders.

A digital-first engagement methodology is essentially a roadmap that guides the execution of your public consultation. It outlines:

- Key project phases and consultation objectives.

- Digital tools for the project.

- Key engagement questions that you'll ask along the way.

Having a well-planned and strategic approach to your online consultations is the best way to ensure a rigorous engagement process that can support informed decision making and strengthen relationships with your stakeholders. A digital-first engagement methodology helps you better plan for a phased approach to your consultation/project and fast-track your ability to achieve best-practice engagement results.

# Digital-First Engagement Methodology

| Project Phase | Project Initiation | Options Identification | Solutions Refinement | Solutions Testing | Project Decision Making | Project Implementation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Engagement Objective | Empathise and Research | Ideate | Critical Assessment | Quantitive Analysis | Formal Assessment | Information Dissemination, Issues Management, Community Feedback |
| Number of Participants Involved | Number contracts as effort required to fully participate increases. | | | | | Number expands as impacts are more fully understood. |

## Best Feedback Tool For Each Project Phase

| | Project Initiation | Options Identification | Solutions Refinement | Solutions Testing | Project Decision Making | Project Implementation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Forum | Open | Mixed | Mixed | Mixed | | Mixed |
| Ideas | Open | Mixed | Mixed | Mixed | | |
| Places | Open | Mixed | Mixed | Mixed | | Mixed |
| Stories | Mixed | Mixed | Mixed | Mixed | | |
| Guestbook | Mixed | Mixed | Mixed | | | |
| Questions | Mixed | Mixed | Mixed | | | |
| Polls | | | | Controlled | | Controlled |
| Surveys | | | | Controlled | Controlled | |

Feedback Tool Key:  ■ Open environment  ■ Mixed environment  ■ Controlled environment

## Asking Engaging Questions

| Consider as you Develop your Project | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| • Demand Contemplation<br>• Be Open | • Promote Positivity<br>• Provide Context<br>• Be Honest | • Present Scenarios<br>• Be Targeted<br>• Be Specific<br>• Dig Deeper | • Be Spatial<br>• Be Provocative<br>• Present Opinions<br>• Be Honest | • Be Clear<br>• Be Specific | • Motivate Involvement<br>• Be Open |

A digital-first engagement methodology is a phased approach to engage with stakeholders which avoids transactional engagement approaches. It consists of five interacting components:

# 1 Project phase

Outlines the stage or lifecycle of your project. Each phase will have a defined duration and a certain set of activities. These phases guide the overall strategies which will be deployed. It is not uncommon for a consultation using these project phases to go on for weeks, months or even years.

# 2 Engagement Objective

Each phase will have a unique engagement objective that needs to be addressed. This objective guides how and who you will interact with, what should be asked of them and the mechanisms for capturing their input.

# 3 Stakeholder Assessment

This outlines the number of voices which need to be heard at each phase of the consultation.

# 4 Key Engagement Questions

Asking the right things at the right time is critical for good outcomes. The key engagement questions for each phase will be guided by objective of that phase and ensure that relevant questions are being asked of your stakeholders.

# 5 Digital Tool Selection

Each phase is best suited to different digital engagement tool for capturing feedback. The EngagementHQ Tool Spectrum has a range of tools to help execute this digital-first engagement methodology.

# Think Strategically for the Long Haul

**Grow your online community**

One of the major benefits of engaging online with EngagementHQ is the ability to create a community of interested people who care about what you are doing.

In our experience, people are keen to be involved and don't mind occasional emails letting them know about the latest opportunity to have their say.

**Our Best Advice**

- Launch your site with a series of slightly controversial projects. You will see far greater participation rates, which will drive up registrations and pay dividends in the long run.

- Run a series of online consultations in parallel or quick succession after your launch to familiarise your community with engaging online.

- Cross-promote a range of different issues. Your community will discover issues that may not have otherwise noticed.

- Run online and offline consultation processes in parallel and promote your online consultation portal at every opportunity during your face- to-face processes.

**Be consistent and patient**

Digital engagement might be a new opportunity for your community and organisation. You need to be consistent and patient. It may well take your community a little time to get used to this new way of engaging. Your organisation may also need a little time to adjust and embed new processes for engaging with communities.

**Our best advice**

- Consistently drive traffic to your online engagement portal by promoting your primary EngagementHQ site address, rather than promoting each of the individual project addresses.

- Run regular campaigns encouraging your community to sign up alongside promotion of your individual projects.

- Using themes, tags or areas of interest to make your projects more discoverable for your community.

- Ensure your call-to-action grabs attention and your project image gives visual cues of your project.
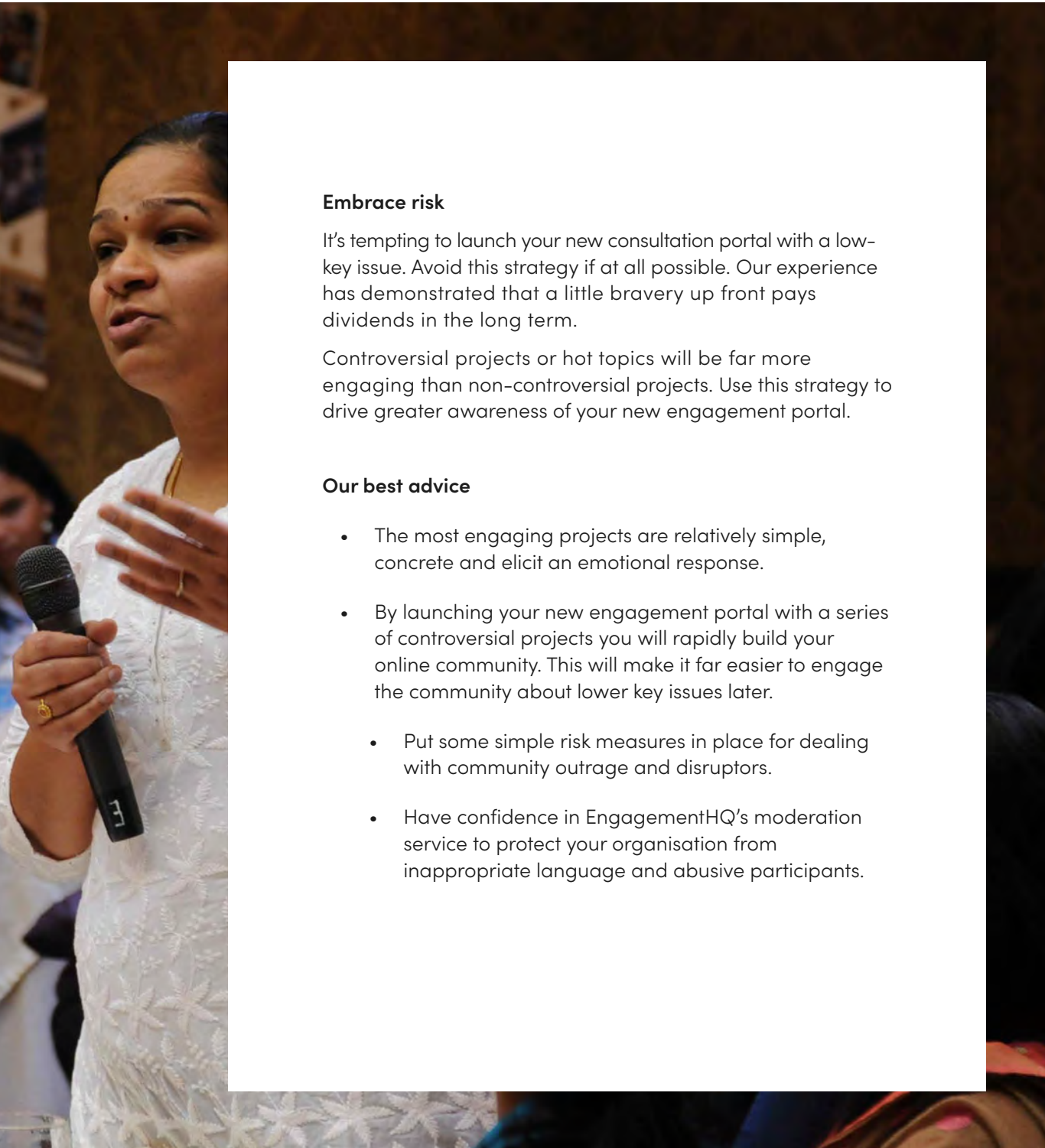
**Embrace risk**

It's tempting to launch your new consultation portal with a low-key issue. Avoid this strategy if at all possible. Our experience has demonstrated that a little bravery up front pays dividends in the long term.

Controversial projects or hot topics will be far more engaging than non-controversial projects. Use this strategy to drive greater awareness of your new engagement portal.

**Our best advice**

- The most engaging projects are relatively simple, concrete and elicit an emotional response.

- By launching your new engagement portal with a series of controversial projects you will rapidly build your online community. This will make it far easier to engage the community about lower key issues later.

  - Put some simple risk measures in place for dealing with community outrage and disruptors.

  - Have confidence in EngagementHQ's moderation service to protect your organisation from inappropriate language and abusive participants.
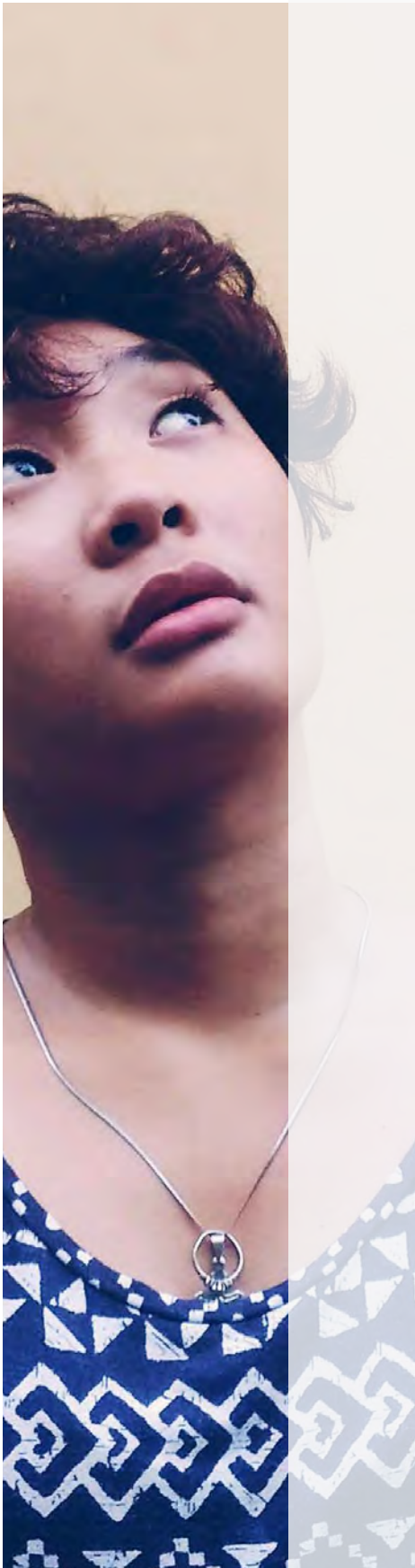
# Planning Your Consultation

## 1    **Map your project**

Identify the purpose of your engagement and how your community can genuinely influence project outcomes. What is the problem or opportunity that needs attention? Understand why you are engaging. Is it to build community capacity, inform decision making or to strengthen relationships? Think about what might change as a result of the project. What are the positive, negative and neutral impacts of those changes?

## 2    **Gather project information**

When thinking about your project information, consider what you already know about the issue. Is there any existing data, feedback or evidence you might use to inform the design of your new consultation? You should also refer to any legislative requirements covering the specific issue as part of your project information gathering.

## 3    **Identify your stakeholders**

Identify the people affected by changes. They might be individuals or collectives, whole streets or places, demographic cohorts, community groups, industry associations, local clubs or a myriad of other possibilities. Collate them all and think about the scale of the impact on each, as well as their potential to influence project outcomes.

Identify your consultation objectives for each stakeholder (individual or group) through the various phases of the project's life. Start by dividing the project up into relevant phases on a horizontal axis and listing each of the stakeholders on a vertical axis. Next identify your various forms of engagement – for example, information, day-to-day feedback, brainstorming, q & a, discussion and dialogue, or collaboration. Finally, allocate a form of engagement to each of your stakeholders for each project phase.

## 4   Outline your objectives and outcomes

Your objectives need to explain what you want to achieve from your engagement. They should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely. You should also think about what success looks like for your project. This will vary from project to project and is occasionally counterintuitive. For example, it is not always a sign of success to receive lots of comments on your project. Define your measurables: site visitors, comments, ideas, downloads, etc.

## 5   Determine what's negotiable and non-negotiable

Next, determine the parameters and limitations of your engagement project. What must you consider, include or accommodate in your project? Outlining your negotiable and non-negotiables will help you clarify what elements can be influenced and those which cannot once a decision has been made.

## 6   Map your risk environment

Understand the risk environment in which you are operating. Determine how sensitive your issue is and to what extent you will involve your stakeholders. Think about what could go wrong and which tools and techniques you can deploy to prevent those risks from occurring. Understanding your engagement environment will help you choose the right tools.

## 7  Choose the right tools for the job

Only once you understand the purpose of your engagement, its objectives and stakeholders, as well as the negotiables, non-negotiables and risk environment, you are ready to choose your engagement tools. If your consultation is high risk, you might consider a controlled environment tool such as a *Survey*; if you want to facilitate and encourage an online dialogue you might select to use a *Forum*; or if you want to manage issues use *Q & A*.

## 8  Plan your promotion

Another myth of the internet is the idea that when you put something online people will mysteriously discover it. Experience has proven that this simply is not true. Good quality promotion of your consultation site will make the singlemost difference between a successful online consultation process and a failed one. You'll find a list of promotional ideas on page 24.

## 9  Create rich, engaging content

It is your role to identify the important content and to present it in a way that makes sense to your stakeholders. Think about using multimedia and audio-visual tools, or distilling your documents into bite-sized chunks. Utilise third-party embeddable tools to help you present relevant project information in an interactive way.

## 10       Think about implementation

You will need to identify a person with responsibility for the day-to-day management of your project on your EngagementHQ portal. This may be the project manager for smaller projects or it may be a communications or community engagement professional for larger projects. Think about how you will interact with the community in the online space. Nominate response times, responsibilities and procedures and protocols ahead of time to reduce stress if the project suddenly picks up pace.

## 11       What happens when it's all over?

Phew! It's all over; you can relax now. Or can you? It's not over until you've extracted all of the great quantitative and qualitative data from your consultation, turned it into a feedback report, worked out how you are going to respond to the data, and let the community know. For example, use the newsfeed to provide updates, change the introduction to your project or publish a report in your list of documents. This is the critical and often missing link in the community engagement process. When you close the loop, it helps to build lasting relationships. When done poorly, it contributes to consultation fatigue and cynicism.

# Selecting the Right Tools

EngagementHQ incorporates the full spectrum of feedback tools. The tools can be used in isolation, in series, in parallel or in any combination throughout the phases of a project. It depends entirely on the nature of your project. The most important thing is to match the tool to the engagement objectives and phases.

All of these tools can be used in an information rich environment (where participants have access to videos, infographics, podcasts, document libraries to find out more about the issue at hand).

# Feedback Tools

## Open environment
Participants can engage with each other. Comments, images and ideas are visible to the community

## Mixed environment
Participants can see other participant contributions. However, there is little peer-to-peer interaction. Some data may be visible to the public, other data is just accessible by admin.

## Controlled environment
Participants cannot engage with each other. Data is stored in the backend and only accessible by admin.

Commenting Disabled | Commenting Enabled

Pre Moderated | Post Moderated

Answered Privately | Answered Publicly

**Forum**

The Forums tool creates a space for discussion, dialogue and debate. People share their experiences with others, ask questions and have conversations in a safe and interactive environment.
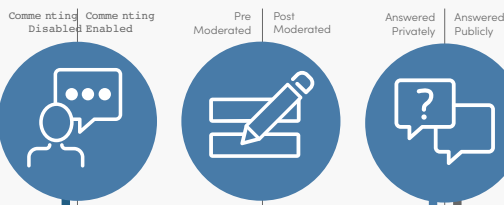
**Ideas**

Ideas provides "virtual" post it notes for individuals to add their ideas to a collective board. People like the ideas that inspire them most, helping align your priorities with what matters most to the community.

**Places**

Places is a simple way to gather community feedback and ideas directly on a map. Participants drop a "pin" in the area of concern, add photos and then fill in a quick survey.

**Stories**

When we tell or hear a story, neuroscience tells us that we experience things on a higher and more resonant level. Stories helps your community better understand, empathize and relate to others as well as your project goals.

**Guestbook**

Guestbook keeps things simple; people are only able to upload comments, which are moderated to manage what appears publicly. No other interaction is enabled.

**Questions**

Questions is an issues management and communications risk mitigation tool. It is a managed space for your community to ask you questions and for you to respond either publicly or privately.

**Polls**
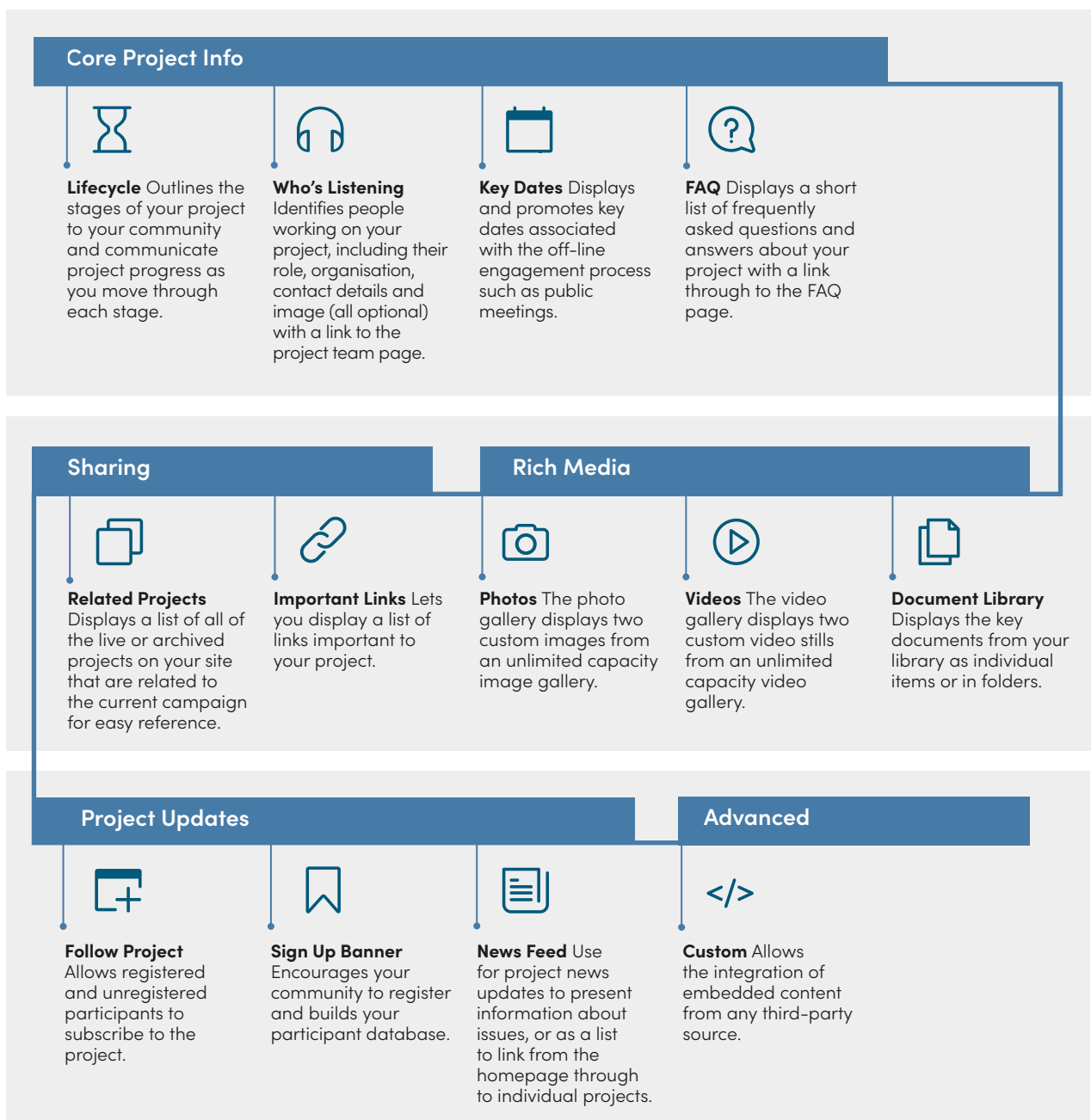
Polls encourage people to give a quick answer on one question, selecting from multiple choice answers. They are able to instantly see the Poll results, piquing their interest and giving you real time insight.

**Surveys**

The Surveys tool gives people an opportunity to voice their opinion in a convenient and guided way, which has historically shown higher response rates than other formats.

# Learning Tools

EngagementHQ incorporates a range of information tools to support your online learning and engagement objectives. Highlight your key content and information resources to make it easier for your audience to self-educate and explore the issues in depth.

## Core Project Info

**Lifecycle** Outlines the stages of your project to your community and communicate project progress as you move through each stage.

**Who's Listening** Identifies people working on your project, including their role, organisation, contact details and image (all optional) with a link to the project team page.

**Key Dates** Displays and promotes key dates associated with the off-line engagement process such as public meetings.

**FAQ** Displays a short list of frequently asked questions and answers about your project with a link through to the FAQ page.

## Sharing

**Related Projects** Displays a list of all of the live or archived projects on your site that are related to the current campaign for easy reference.

**Important Links** Lets you display a list of links important to your project.

## Rich Media

**Photos** The photo gallery displays two custom images from an unlimited capacity image gallery.

**Videos** The video gallery displays two custom video stills from an unlimited capacity video gallery.

**Document Library** Displays the key documents from your library as individual items or in folders.

## Project Updates

**Follow Project** Allows registered and unregistered participants to subscribe to the project.

**Sign Up Banner** Encourages your community to register and builds your participant database.

**News Feed** Use for project news updates to present information about issues, or as a list to link from the homepage through to individual projects.

## Advanced

**Custom** Allows the integration of embedded content from any third-party source.

# Promoting Your Consultation

Letting people know about the opportunity to get involved in your project is crucial to the success of any community engagement process. Digital-first community engagement is no different from traditional methods in this respect. But how do you drive public participation to your site? Here are key ways to help promote your project:

**Link**

Place a prominent link to your site on your corporate website.  Link to your online engagement project on your email signature, or even better, for your entire organisation.

**Easy URL**

Select an easy to remember URL and promote it on website and all project collateral.

**Brand**

Create a strong, attention-grabbing brand and use it on all promotional material, social media, your organisation's websites and any associated project information. Using similar messaging and 'look and feel' across all media can dramatically increase the effectiveness of your engagement campaign and will help create awareness and involvement in your engagement project.

**Use Digital Media**

Share a short video on social explaining how people can get involved in your project. Use emerging technologies such as VR and AR or games to engage people with your project.

**Local Media Outlets**

Write a press release with an eye-grabbing headline to your local paper. Negotiate a feature article or opinion piece. Talk up the issue on local radio, or, if you're in a regional area and the issue is big enough, get on regional TV and talk up the project.

**Leaflets, Brochures & Flyers**

Hand out leaflets with your project URL prominent at public events, where people meet in your community (clubs, libraries, pubs, corner shops) and at public meetings, open-house days, kiosks etc. In a commuter suburb? Hand out cards with a call to action and URL at the station – just about everyone on that train has a smartphone and some spare travel time.

**Face-to-face**

Integrate your digital consultations with face-to-face activities.

**Be Active on Project Forums**

Interact with visitors to the forum - they are more likely to come back and also tell their friends and networks that you're listening.

**Local Heros**

Who do your community listen to? Enlist the help of local 'influencers', local champions or advocates who can help get the word out. Get your mayor, minister, governor or senator to spend an hour a week reading comments and replying to people. Word will soon get out that this is a place to really influence things.

**Local Groups**

Identify local groups with an online presence and link to project in their forums.
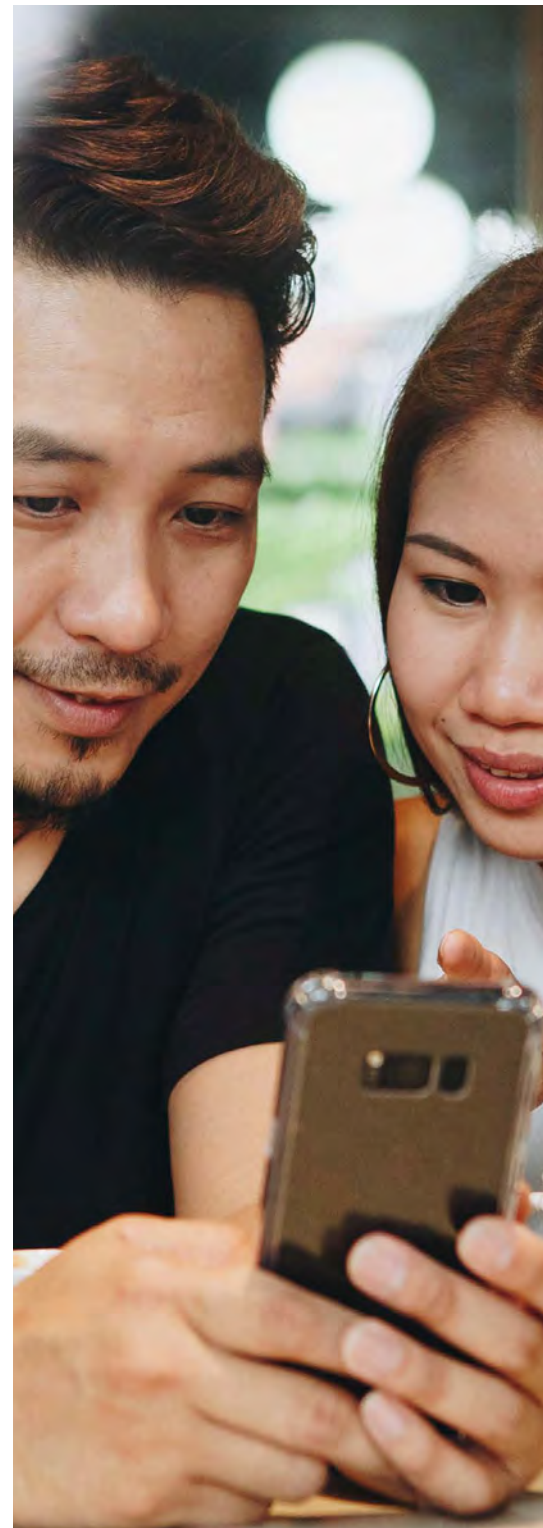
### Direct Email

Direct email your staff to let them know about the project and ask them to pass on to their friends and family or direct email your local community organisations. Five hundred staff who tell three friends and family gets your project off to a great start.

### Libraries

Ask local libraries to display signage and instructions for joining the consultation. Promote the opportunity to get involved to people visiting the facility. Consider ipads in the lobby as a way to get people started.

### Schools

Talk to local schools who may be interested in assisting pupils to participate. Get a notice in your local schools' newsletters. Include information about your online engagement portal/project, or incorporate it into a classroom activity. Create classroom exercises mapped to curriculum for teachers to deliver and engage with children.

### Social Media & Social Sharing

List your consultation on active facebook pages and social networking sites. Encourage social sharing of community-created content.

### Databases

Use online engagement tools repeatedly to build a community of people you can contact each time you launch a new project. Use existing databases to create and distribute an e-newsletter promoting your consultations and projects outcomes to date.

# Accessibility

We believe that no community engagement technology provides such ready access to the engagement process as the internet. Ensuring your online engagement portal is accessible for all community members is an essential responsibility for organisations who engage online. Nevertheless, equality of internet access remains an issue for some population cohorts.

While we keep up-to-date with the latest advances in accessibility techniques and continually assess accessibility, here are some ways to make your project more accessible.
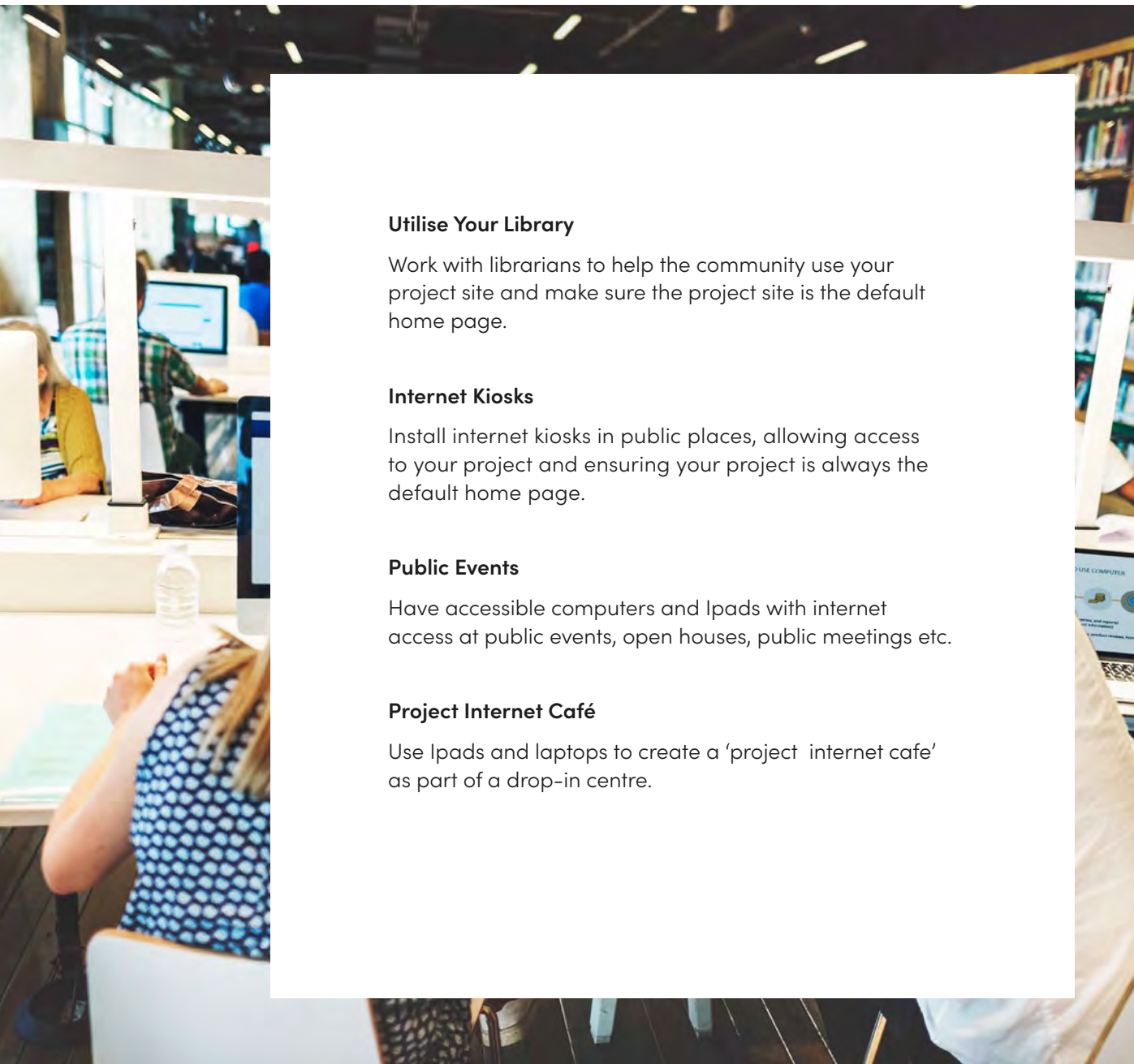
### Utilise Your Library

Work with librarians to help the community use your project site and make sure the project site is the default home page.

### Internet Kiosks

Install internet kiosks in public places, allowing access to your project and ensuring your project is always the default home page.

### Public Events

Have accessible computers and Ipads with internet access at public events, open houses, public meetings etc.

### Project Internet Café

Use Ipads and laptops to create a 'project internet cafe' as part of a drop-in centre.

**Community Centres**

Work with local community and youth centres to promote access.

**Integrate into School Curriculums**

Talk to local schools about integrating your project into their curriculum.

**Build Stakeholder Capacity**

Use your consultation as an opportunity for capacity building and skills development. Train your stakeholders in literacy barriers and use your project as a learning environment.

**Use Small Files**

Break up large documents into chapters, and be sure to divide maps into manageable scales.

# Making Your EngagementHQ Portal Accessible

EngagementHQ ensures all themes, templates and engagement tools are accessible, which overcomes the problem of single-use engagement tools available for hosting and running online engagement activities. In addition to this, here are vital ways to make your EngagementHQ portal accessible:

### Use Headings to Organise Content

While EngagementHQ already has built-in heading structures for page templates, using predefined heading styles in project descriptions helps better organisation and can easily read by a screen reader for people with a visual impairment.

### Use Alt-text for Images

Alt-text enables participants using screen readers to easily understand messages. Ensure appropriate alt-text and consider messages you are trying to convey through images – and always provide alt-text for images that are used as links.

### Use Proper Descriptive Links

Including hyperlinks in project descriptions needs proper description. Ensure the most important content related to the link is presented first i.e. "To learn about the project, read the Project Overview."
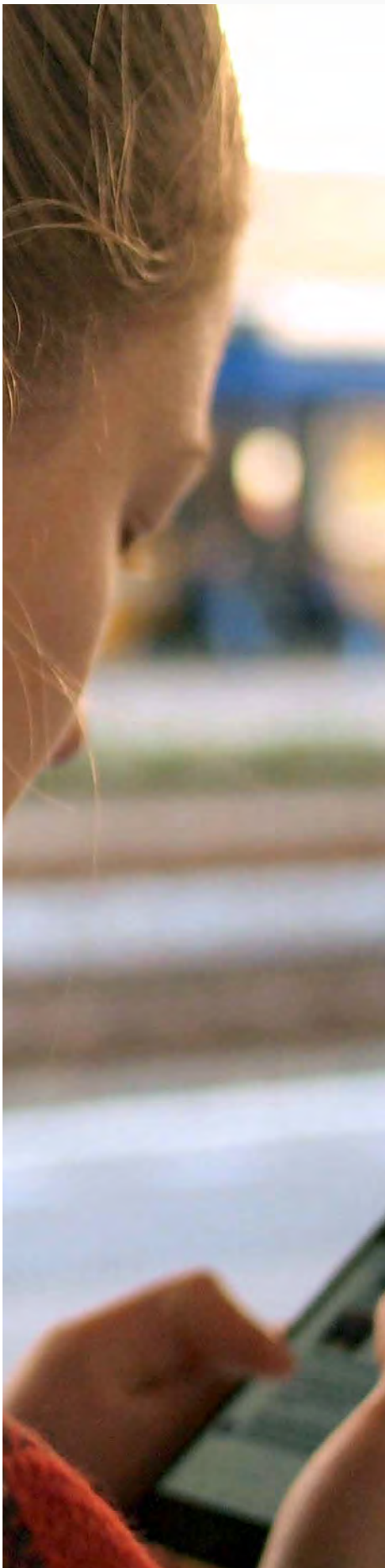
## Use Colour

In addition to incorporating brand colours into your site, it's essential to select a combination of contrasts of colours to help participants with visual impairment. Make your digital engagement site as visually usable for participants with low vision or varying levels of colour blindness.

## Accessible Surveys & Forms

As well as registration forms, ensure you have clearly labelled all form fields across your site to ensure they are accessible. Organise forms with section heading to help participants keep track of progress.

## Project Description

Avoid using tables for page layout in your project description – this creates confusion for screen readers and visually impaired participants. Use CCS and inline styles to lay out project description information.

## Accessible plugins

Although EngagementHQ allows you to plugin third party embeddable widgets and tools, you need to be sure those tools will be accessible. EngagementHQ provides access to best range of digital and learning tools (see page 23) that are both compliant and meet the latest accessibility standards.

## Use Plain English

Awareness of different literacy and language barriers faced by your community is essential to communicating your engagement project. Using plain English for project description text and instructions ensures it reaches the widest audience possible.

## Identify Further Support

Having easily accessible information on where and how to get further support for services such as language translation and interpretation will further make your project accessible to participants, Adding a chat functionality to your EngagementHQ site will further improve your project's accessibility.

# Our Independent Moderation Process

Content moderation is vital to any digital engagement – from automated moderation of inappropriate content to sanctioning 'grey areas' that require human intervention. Effective content moderation facilitates participants willingness to get online and join in conversations that impact their lives. It also ensures a sense of accessibility and inclusion – uppermost to all digital engagement.

But moderation is a tricky business that requires skill and experience. At its heart is the need to balance genuine opportunity for the individual to speak out with the necessity to ensure the conversation stays safe and on track.

Bang the Table has developed a pragmatic set of guidelines that optimise issues and listen to their nuances within their community context, allowing everyone to have their say without fear, intimidation or retribution. We've found that people are prepared to be polite, to play by the rules and to allow space for meaningful public discourse where they feel safe to get involved and have their say without fear of harassment or trolling from those who may disagree with their opinion.

Our best-practice moderation system combines the pre- and post-comment moderation to ensure that discussions we host stay safe and on track while giving the community a genuine opportunity to freely debate the issues that matter to them. Of 240,798 comments seen by our moderation team over the last year, less than 1% have been rejected because they breached our moderation policy.[1]

Our dedicated moderation portal ensures all of our sites are independently moderated effectively and efficiently. This allows you to:

- Review all comments for any period.

- Review accepted comments.

- Review deleted comments.

- Review black listed comments.

- Review filtered comments.

- Reverse moderator decisions in consultation with the bang the Table team.

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[1.] In the 2018/19 time period, 240,798 thousand comments were accepted by our moderation team in our online communities with only 779 deleted for breach of our moderation policy. In addition, 1,376 comments were reported by participants to our moderators for review.

# Phase 1

**Automated Pre-Comment Moderation**

**Automated Language Filter**

EngagementHQ will pick up comments that include any of our 'blacklisted' words. A message will appear on screen as follows: *Our system has picked up that there is some potentially bad language in your comment. We will need to review the comment before it goes live on the site.*

The following note will appear as a placeholder within the forum until the comment has either been accepted or rejected by the moderator: *This comment is currently under review.*

**Pre-moderation of Potential SPAM**

EngagementHQ will recognise if an excessive number of comments have been entered within a short time period. The participant account will be temporarily blocked and their comments will be automatically diverted to the moderators for review prior to going live.

# Phase 2

**Manual Post-Comment Moderation**

**First Pass Review & Triage**

One of our team of experienced moderators based in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Switzerland or England will read each comment within two hours of it being entered into the site. The comments are "triaged" by the moderators as follows:

- Comments that clearly breach the language, defamation, hectoring, spam and other moderation rules are removed immediately;

- Comments that are clearly within the moderation rules are accepted;

- Comments requiring further assessment are elevated for review by
a senior moderator;

- If the senior moderation team is unsure how to treat a comment the client is contacted for advice regarding both context and organisational policy. This process occasionally leads to the refinement of the moderation rules.

If a comment is removed, two things happen:

- It is replaced on the site by a note from the moderation team notifying the rest of the online community that a comment has indeed been removed and reason for such; and

- An email is automatically sent to the participant notifying them that the comment has been removed and the reasons for the removal. The participant is given the opportunity to challenge the decision.

**Second Pass Review**

All deleted comments are reviewed by one of our team of senior moderators on a daily basis.
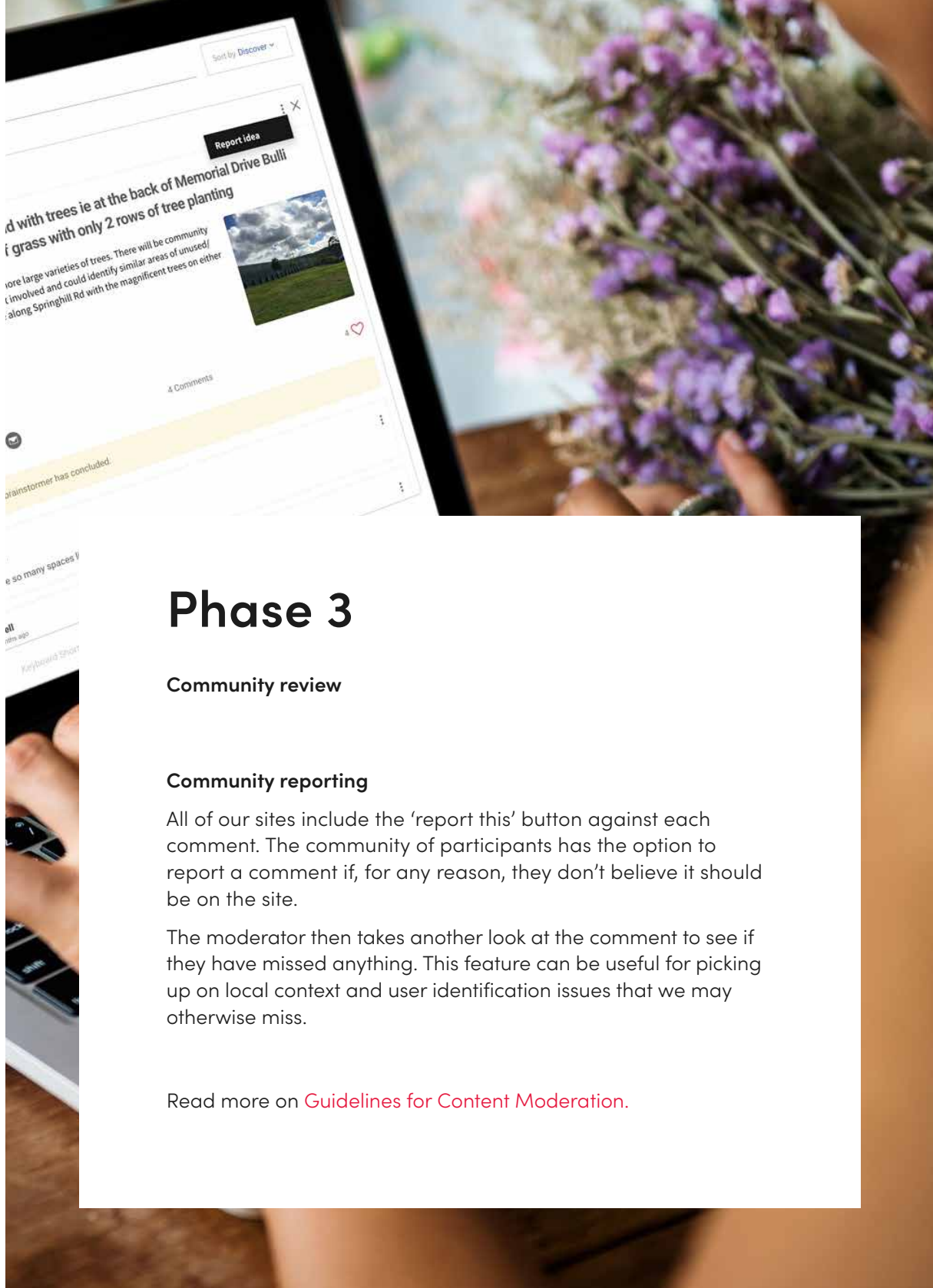
# Phase 3

**Community review**

**Community reporting**

All of our sites include the 'report this' button against each comment. The community of participants has the option to report a comment if, for any reason, they don't believe it should be on the site.

The moderator then takes another look at the comment to see if they have missed anything. This feature can be useful for picking up on local context and user identification issues that we may otherwise miss.

Read more on Guidelines for Content Moderation.

# Implementing Your Digital Engagement

**Promoting**

A quick reminder; if you don't let your audience know about the consultation they won't participate. So get promoting!

**Managing**

Once you're up and running, there may not be a lot to do in terms of day-to-day management of your site. It's worth taking a taking a look with fresh eyes to tidy up stray fonts, par down excess text, simplify document names etc.

**Monitoring**

If you're using any of the 'live' feedback tools – *Forums, Guestbook, Q & A* – you need to be watching your site regularly to see what people are saying. Think about setting up an RSS feed to send new community content directly to your inbox.

**Elevating**

Keep an eye out for issues that need to be elevated to the project team, project manager or to other parts of the organisation.

**Responding**

Join the discussion forum to address minor issues people might have raised. Perhaps they can be pointed in the direction of useful resources, provided with a straightforward answer to a question, or given a phone number to contact for a chat.

### Facilitating

If you have the skill set on hand join the forums and ask participants follow up questions to dig deeper into the motivations behind their thoughts, feelings and ideas.

### Updating

Add new content to your site as regularly as possible. If there is no new collateral or major project announcements, think about changing the *Quick Poll* question to keep things lively.

### Reporting

Check the quantitative reports regularly to see whether you are achieving your goals. Use this information to review, and if necessary, revise your promotions plan.

### Tagging

Start tagging the forum comments with keywords from day one. This will save you time in the long run and help you keep a watching eye on the key issues participants are talking about.

### Reminding

Use the bulk email feature to let your participants know about project updates, changes to the consultation period, new content on your site and most importantly that your consultation is closing soon!

# Reporting & Analysis

It's best to start the process of analysing your consultation outcomes well before the project wraps up. This will allow you to adjust your strategy along the way and will save you time in the long run.

EngagementHQ provides a range of digital reporting tools to help you track and measure your project's performance. Use our purpose-built Aware, Informed, Engaged metrics to understand levels of engagement with your project and use EngagementHQ's four major analytical tools: *Text Analysis* for qualitative sentiment and tagging; *Survey Analysis* to explore and compare survey insights; and, *Summary Analysis* and *Project Analysis* to get a deeper overall picture of your digital engagement performance.

### Text Analysis

Use this tool to identify and track themes and sentiments from qualitative inputs across all of EngagementHQ tools, i.e. *Forms* or open ended *Surveys*.

### Survey Analysis

Use this tool to help you identify and compare how different segments of your consultation think and feel about your project. Use this to drill into your data for granular insights.

### Summary Analysis

Allows you to track your digital engagement performance over time by looking at Aware, Informed, Engaged metrics, tool and information widget usage, traffic sources, page views, visitors and registration performance. It also allows you to select groups of projects to analyse together.

### Project Analysis

Analysis at a project level looking for visitor interaction with engagement tools, information materials such as documents, plans and graphics as well as the number of Aware, Informed and Engaged participants. Feedback and insights at a project level allow you to track registration conversions, traffic referrals and more.

### Comment Tagging

Comment tagging is a handy way to cluster lots of qualitative data into manageable piles. For example, if you get 1000 comments in your *Forum*, comment tagging allows you to create groups of 'like' comments by keyword.

Prepare a short list of keywords or 'tags' before you start to tag the comments. This prevents the tagging process from getting out of hand.

### Multiple lists

Create several lists of tags to deal with comments in a variety of ways. For example, you can have issue tags, place tags, people tags and sentiment tags. This will help to give you a sense not only of what people are most interested in, but which localities they are focused on and how they are feeling about the proposal.

### Start early

Start tagging your comments from day one of the project going live. It will save time in the long run and will help you to become very familiar with the data.

### Check 'miscellaneous'

Once you have done one run-through of the tagging process, check to see how many comments have found their way into the 'miscellaneous' pile or are untagged. If the pile is too big, see if you can identify any unifying themes to create one or two new tags.

### Sub themes

If any of your piles are still too large to make sense of, you might want to consider identifying sub-themes. For example, if your main theme was 'transport', sub themes could be public, private, and commercial. The keyword search may be helpful here.

### Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative reports are broken up into a number of tables to provide ready access to lots of participant data from across your site. Interpreting the reports can be tricky, but there are some rules of thumb we have picked up along the way that may be of use.

### Don't Panic

The most important thing to note is that low numbers do not necessarily mean that a consultation process has failed, just as high numbers do not necessarily mean a consultation has succeeded. It entirely depends on your objectives, measures and targets.

### Unique Visitors

The first metric to look at is, generally, the number of unique visitors to your site. You'll find this in the very first table. This is your basic 'site traffic' number and is an indication of both how hot the issue is and how well you have promoted it. If this is exceeding your expectations, then all good. If it is below your expectations, then you may need to do more to promote it.

### Registrations

The second metric we generally look at is the proportion of visitors who have registered to take part in your project. This can provide a good indication about the levels of interest in your particular project. The average over 400 plus projects is 8–12% new registrations. We generally advise that if your registration rate is lower than around 5% for a particular project, then the broader community is not particularly engaged with the issue. If your registration rate is over around 15%, then we would generally say that your community are very engaged and you have a 'hot' issue on your hands. Of course, this metric is only relevant if you are asking your community to register to take part as unverified participation will not drive this score.

### Downloads

Another useful metric we pay close attention to is the proportion of visitors who are downloading documents or watching videos. This gives you a good idea of the general level of community interest in the project. If this number is very high at the same time as the number of site registrations is very low, there is a very good chance that your community, while interested in the project, are actually reasonably happy with the proposal.

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