

A blurred background of a public meeting with a microphone in the foreground. The microphone is a gooseneck style with a black foam cover. The background shows a group of people seated at tables, some looking towards the camera and others looking away. The lighting is warm and the overall tone is professional.

# Digitizing public engagement: How to gain richer feedback from your constituents



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Whether you manage a multibillion-dollar capital program for a state DOT or lead a million-dollar renovation for your local agency, you will invariably need public feedback on your capital plans and infrastructure projects. You will improve project design and expected performance by gaining public input at the onset of a program or a project. The earlier you gain feedback, the better off your organization will be. But how is your agency currently managing public engagement? During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, your strategy is probably a combination of Zoom meetings, brochures, and information found on a website.

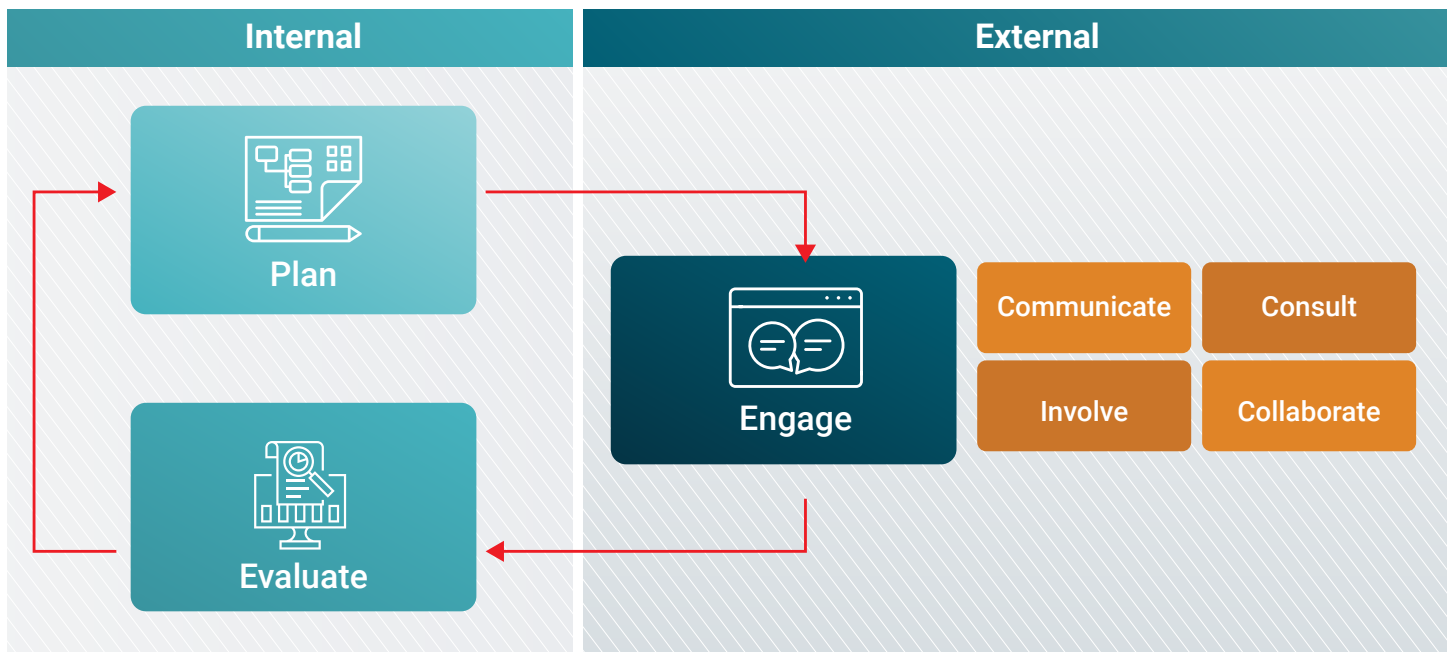
You must give the public balanced and objective information to help them grasp the challenges at hand, the available options, and the solutions. This would, in turn, help you get your plans approved on time. Oftentimes, you also need stakeholder feedback and public approval to advance or modify your projects.

## Public engagement process

Your constituents feedback will influence your project, so it's important to have a solid engagement process in place, beginning with the planning phase of a project. Different project types will have different levels of engagement needed from the public.

During the planning phase of your project, key questions need to be addressed, such as who will the project affect, how will their feedback weigh into the decision-making process, and what type of engagement are you looking to receive from your stakeholders. Once your government agencies has determined which community members and/or organizations must be reached, you can determine the best way to communicate and what the desired timeline is.

## Public engagement process



At a high level, government agencies typically bucket their levels of engagement into the following:

### Communicate

Updating the public on current projects; for example, newsletters, emails, social media

### Consult

Sharing ideas and feedback on a specific project; for example, public hearings/forums, online feedback forms

### Involve

Addressing specific needs or concerns; for example, focus groups, roundtable discussions

### Collaborate

Partnering with the public on solutions or changes; for example, citizen-led engagement and advisory committees

Prior to running any type of engagement campaign, it's important to consider how you will record and analyze the feedback you receive. Once you've compiled all of your data, it's time to analyze the information to see how the feedback may affect your project. Plan to update the public on the responses received and how their feedback will play a role in the upcoming project.



Current options for public engagement tools are designed to help you collect feedback for a specific project. These solutions will let you name your project, send out a survey, gather feedback from your website, and give you all the comments in a spreadsheet or an online report. These tools are not designed for the public commenting process of capital programs that contain tens to thousands of individual projects and require public feedback before the capital plans can be approved. The review process can take weeks to sort through, which ultimately slows down your entire program. Brochures, newsletters, and fact sheets are costly, hard to distribute, and are often overlooked. The response to phone surveys, radio ads, and town hall meetings is hard to predict.

Outlined below are common challenges often encountered during the public engagement process and how investing in a public engagement platform will help ease, for that matter, even eliminate these tedious problems.

## Quality (or the lack) of engagement

When you're seeking input on a multiyear capital program, the public often wants to comment on a particular project or piece of your program, in addition to the overall priorities laid out in your plan. Your agency will end up with large amounts of feedback from the public often in a disorganized manner. Or, on the flip side, you may end up with not enough feedback due to the lack of information reaching the public.



**Solution:** Share the vital information the public needs to know, allow them to review your capital programs, and share feedback in one online location. Users can easily search and comment on proposed projects relevant to their location using a map-based public portal.

## Limited audience reach

Traditional ways of communicating to the community often don't reach the intended audience. Brochures go unnoticed, meetings are unknown, and it's easy to miss notices of upcoming public forums.



**Solution:** Go digital and connect with a larger audience. Your public wants to connect with you. Leverage all-in-one solutions with integrated social tools to get the most engagement. Additionally, you can design feedback campaigns that enable you to send and promote surveys to ask for feedback from a broader set of constituents or import comments you collect from other sources.

## Slow dissemination of information to the public

Brochures, organizing public forums, and other traditional ways of sharing information with your constituents can take a significant amount of time to organize, prepare and send out to the community, slowing down the entire process. This is a huge hindrance as every day counts when preparing to begin a public project.



**Solution:** Moving your public engagement online will allow for the easy setup of your capital program with all the necessary data for the public to consume. With the click of a button, the public can access information on a map that allows them to assess the proposed projects in a meaningful way to themselves and their existing neighborhood.

## Slow and cumbersome review of feedback

In most agencies, reviewing public feedback is a manual process that can take someone anywhere from one week to a month to scan and evaluate all the comments that you receive from the public. Simple survey tools and online portals allow you to collect public comments for an individual project but then dump all the comments into an Excel file for manual review.



**Solution:** Look for a public engagement system designed with inbuilt Artificial Intelligence (AI) to collect feedback early in the capital planning process and to review every comment for you—instantly cataloging each comment and measuring the sentiment of each person who participates. This technology is called sentiment analysis or emotion AI.

*In its simplest terms, sentiment analysis uses technology to review your data for positive, negative, or neutral tones. It can also scan for emotional feedback such as happiness, frustration, anger, and so on, and then automatically weigh feedback in an easy-to-read format for your team. These systems are also able to gauge the severity of the language being analyzed. Using sentiment analysis to consider public feedback will eliminate a considerable amount of time spent processing and understanding the data, offer real-time analysis, and ensure the data you get back on each project is consistent.*



*This cutting-edge technology will review, analyze, and instantly categorize comments for you based on each comment's sentiment and feedback. A real-time dashboard and reporting system will show you comments, distribution over a region, public rating score, comment disposition, and more for each project and campaign.*

In the age of technology, public engagement should be more precise, concise, and, most importantly, user-friendly.

Masterworks Community Engagement is an all-in-one, secure, cloud-based platform that helps government agencies streamline public involvement in capital planning and gather more meaningful input from constituents. With built-in AI-based sentiment analysis, the platform instantly detects themes, tone, and emotions in feedback—empowering agencies to better understand community needs and make informed decisions. It enables agencies to track their public involvement process and streamline FHWA reporting for capital planning and compliance reviews, saving time and improving accuracy. Teams can collect input more efficiently, reducing processing time by up to 50% across all project stages.

Designed for inclusivity, Masterworks Community Engagement promotes equal participation by capturing feedback from older adults, individuals with disabilities, and multilingual communities. It is fully ADA compliant and meets all government agency security standards, including SOC2, FISMA, FedRAMP, and WCAG 2.0. As a 100% cloud-based solution, it requires no software or hardware installation and offers a user-friendly experience for both agency staff and the communities they serve.



## About Aurigo Software

Aurigo builds software that helps build the world. Aurigo is an AI-native company that helps capital owners connect planning, construction, and operations in a single environment, improving decision-making and execution. Trusted by over 300 organizations across infrastructure and facilities, Aurigo manages more than \$450 billion in capital programs, with over 40,000 projects throughout North America. Aurigo is a privately held U.S. corporation headquartered in Austin, Texas, with global offices in Canada, South Africa, and India.

Learn more at [www.aurigo.com](http://www.aurigo.com)

## Schedule a Demo

Schedule your demo today to learn how Aurigo Masterworks can help your organization streamline information, accurately track and forecast, prioritize projects and help you save time and money.



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