The practical **communications** kit

Best practices to launch a digital consultation

Get your citizens engaged on local topics

citizen**lab**

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Introduction

Communication is vital in creating an effective, valuable and engaging platform for your community. How do you launch your platform? How do you communicate about your projects? How do you share results? These questions will define how many citizens you reach, and as a result, how many citizens get the chance to give their opinion on local policy. Excellent communication does not require a huge budget, but it does require frequency and creativity. With this guide, we hope to inspire you with feasible communication practices that will boost engagement on your platform.

This guide is based on CitizenLab's experience in working with over 200 cities and local governments of all sizes. It features practical tips about how to communicate about your digital participation platform, where to focus your efforts, and which channels to prioritise. Moreover, we share our partners' best communication practices to illustrate how these tips and tricks can work in real life. If you want to dive deeper into communication strategies or give your launch a more significant boost, know that we're here to help.

Enjoy your read!

**Do you have any questions or remarks after reading this guide?
Feel free to reach out to us!**

Three **key** principles

Before we dive into the best practices, it is essential to align on the fundamental principles behind all the communication related to your platform. Communication for a citizen participation project relies on three main principles: clarity, continuity, and diversity.

1. **Clarity:** Why are you launching a digital platform or a specific project? How can citizens contribute? How much influence will their input have? Why should your community care? The answers to these questions should be crystal clear in your communication. Be creative, brief, and precise in these messages. It's worth it to invest some time in formulating these key messages at the start of your project, as you will benefit from it throughout the process. Finally, choose one clear call to action to push in your messaging.

2. **Diversity:** Once you have defined a clear message, it's time to make sure people see it. You're most likely to reach a wide audience if you share your communications on a variety of channels. Which are the channels your government typically works with? Could there be new channels worth trying? Use a mix of options and don't be afraid to experiment! That way, you ensure that you not only increase awareness in your community, but also reach a more diverse audience.

Clarity

Continuity

Diversity
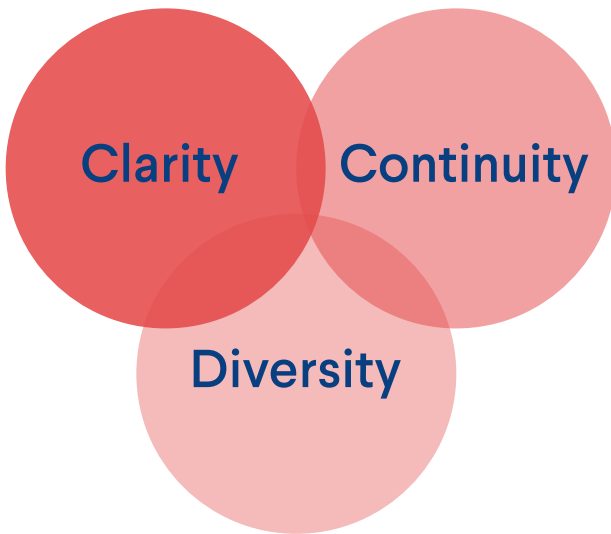
3. **Continuity**: One good message is not enough. Make sure you continue to communicate with citizens regularly. Even after the launch of your platform or project, you should keep your community informed. What is happening in this phase? Which ideas are popular? What are the next steps? To ensure you continue to share updates, it can help to plan your communication with a content calendar. These second, third, and fourth updates will not only help you to gain users, they will also reinforce trust among existing users.

Top online channels

After launching over 150 platforms with cities and local governments, we have found that a combination of several online channels often works best for communication: **direct web traffic, email campaigns, website referrals and social media**.

There are different ways to tap into each of these channels. You can invest in extensive campaigns, but also focus on organic reach and targeted messages. Regardless of your exact budget, these channels offer ample opportunities to create awareness and increase engagement on your platform. Always **try to combine** – at least – these four channels in your communications plan to make sure your strategy adheres to the principle of diversity.

We will focus on practices you can realise without investing substantial resources. However, if you have the budget to go more in-depth or increase the size of your campaign, there are additional channels (such as ads and radio) your team could consider.

1. Direct web traffic

In most cases, direct web traffic is the primary driver of website visits. That's why you need to make sure that the platform is well-referenced and easy to find by citizens who look for it in search engines.

- The first step is to **choose your domain name (URL).** It is important to select a URL that is relevant to your project and easy for citizens to remember. A so-called 'subdomain' such as idea.mycity.uk or participation.mycounty.uk is a winner.

- When websites use **relevant keywords**, their search ranking increases. It's therefore helpful to use words like "citizen participation" or "participatory budgeting" (if applicable) in prominent places on your platform.

- Finally, the more web pages **link** to a website, the better its ranking gets. A high ranking means that your platform is more likely to pop up on top in search engines. Make sure to reference the platform sufficiently on your government website and that your partner websites, news articles or press articles also link to it.

Checklist - Direct web traffic

- Set a memorable URL

- Define your priority keywords - which words do you want to be associated with? How should citizens find you?

- Make sure that these keywords are used on your websites and feature in prominent titles.

- Referrals and partners: add links to the platform on the other websites that you own, and ask partner websites to host a link as well.

2. Email campaigns

Email is the channel that often generates the most **engagement**. Since the city is trusted and recognised by citizens, the opening rates are high and the emails can drive a lot of traffic to the platforms. Citizens visiting the platform via email are also more likely to create an account and spend time interacting with the platform.

Think about the email lists you already have. Could you introduce the platform in a newsletter? If you have already assembled a list of citizens that are interested in participation through previous projects, could you invite them to your new project? Before getting started on these emails, always ensure the citizens on these lists have previously consented to be contacted.

Email campaigns shouldn't just be a one-off. They can be used to share the launch, but also to keep citizens updated and to promote the results. Continuity is key, and cities communicating about the results a few weeks after the launch usually see a new surge in account creations. Do you have a newsletter? Create a new section to share short updates on your platform and projects. Emails can also come from your partners. If civil society organisations or sports clubs are sending out newsletters, these can offer an opportunity to reach new audiences.

Checklist - Email campaigns

- ○ **Define your audience**: whom are you trying to reach? How can these audiences be divided into different groups? Are you already in touch with them? Consider your channels and contacts: are you already sending regular emails to your citizens? Is there a list of email addresses from a previous participation project that you could use?

- ○ **Define a clear message**. In a long email, you have the space to introduce the project. In a short banner or paragraph, you want to focus on creating interest and directing users to the website.

- ○ **Choose your tools:** if you're sending emails to an extensive list, emailing tools like <u>Mailchimp,</u> <u>SendinBlue</u> or <u>Mailerlite</u> can help you to manage contacts and format emails.

- ○ **Referrals and partners:** think about the partners who could add a link to the platform in their emails. This is key to reach a large part of your community, as it will be difficult to do so entirely on your own.

- ○ **Prepare regular follow-ups:** what are the project's next milestones?

CASE STUDY

Knokke-Heist boosts citizen engagement via email invitations

Knokke-Heist, a Belgian municipality, experimented with email invitations for the launch of their CitizenLab platform. Rather than start a new campaign from scratch, they used a mailing list of citizens who had already taken part in a previous participation project (and had agreed to be contacted for future projects). The uptake from this campaign was huge: almost **a third of the recipients** went on to create an account on the new platform!

Creating a mailing list with citizens who have shown interest in participation projects before can be helpful for upcoming projects. However, make sure you also reach out to other community groups, partners and keep using other channels as well - diversity is key!

3. Website referrals

Citizens visiting your city website are potential users of your participation platform. That's why you want to make sure that your website features **visible and clear information** about the project.

There are several options to go about this. You can have a dedicated page with all the relevant details about the participation project on your website, or just a link to your platform on the home page. Either way, it's essential to let citizens know they can participate, why it is important that they should, and how to get to the platform. **Clear calls to actions, like visible buttons** to your platform, can help to draw attention!

Adding an **interactive widget** to your website to showcase the latest citizen contributions can help to highlight the benefits of the platform. As previously mentioned, having your platform referenced on other websites helps with the search ranking. Who are the partners that could feature a link to the platform on their websites?

You could also experiment with **pop-ups** on your city website linking to your participation platform. There're different tools out there that you could try out, such as Intercom or Drift. But before you invest in a third party app, do check if your Content Management System (CMS, the environment your website is made in) doesn't have this functionality built-in.

Checklist – Website referrals

O   Can the visitors on your city website easily find the platform and learn what it's about?

O   Is it feasible to implement a widget and/or pop-up campaign to draw attention to the platform?

O   Are there other websites, from partners or local communities, that can link to your platform?

Marche-en-Famenne boosts participation numbers

Marche-en-Famenne, a Belgian municipality with 15,000 inhabitants, is the living proof that you do not have to be a huge city to get a high number of citizens on your platform. In less than three months' time, the platform received no fewer than 7,000 visitors, 2,850 of which registered to vote for their favourite future city square.

The communication department developed a strategy that focused on three important pillars: local press, Facebook and the municipal website.

+ **Success factor 1 |** Support from the **local press** gave the platform visibility on almost all local news channels around the time of the launch. This accounted for about 26% of the registrations.

+ **Success factor 2 |** **Regular Facebook posts** encouraged residents to vote for or against certain ideas. Some of these posts were shared over 150 times. These accounted for about 27% of the registrations.

+ **Success factor 3 |** Finally, the **widget** that linked from the municipal website to the platform accounted for a further 16% of the registrations.

4. Social media

If your city has social media accounts, we recommend you to use those channels to promote the platform. With a strategic overview of the channels to use and the messages to craft, you can make a significant impact with little to no budget!

The first step is to consider the differences between the channels, and decide which channels are most applicable to your objective. LinkedIn is aimed at professional communities. Instagram has younger users and is image-based. Twitter is for instant news. Facebook has an older demographic and is a good place to share information and events. Many communities already interact with each other via **Facebook groups**: think of neighbourhoods associations, community groups, or simply residents of the city. Posting informative messages about the platform in these targeted groups might help to turn these users into ambassadors!

The second step is to think about the messaging. For a post to drive traffic to your platform, it has to demonstrate the benefits of participation to your citizens. This can be achieved in several ways. You can share general posts about your platform, but we also **recommend highlighting specific projects, showing things to vote for or to decide on, and sharing ideas that were added by other citizens**. A statement, an idea or a direct question on social media can engage citizens by allowing them to respond emotionally. How do you feel about a new park in the city centre? What should the park look like? Do you agree with this idea from a fellow citizen? Social media posts like these are a nice addition to messages like "Share your idea on our platform".

Finally, also think about **sponsored ads**! Targeting can help you to reach specific age or interest groups in defined geographical areas. We've seen that it helps to boost the platform's awareness and drive traffic to the site. If you're investing money in a paid campaign, make sure you're tracking the results to know which setting or visual works best.

Checklist - Social media campaigns

- **Define your audience:** who are you trying to reach? What's the best platform to do so?

○ **Define a very clear message with a single call to action.** Which page of the platform should your posts link to? What action do you want people to take on the website?

○ **Add an appealing visual to your post.** It should feature as little text as possible, have a high-quality image, and have the right dimensions for the social media channel. If you need to create one, you can use free design tools like Canva or Unsplash for images that are free to use.

○ **Think about the time of day:** avoid posting late at night or on calmer days like Friday and Saturday. Online articles can offer guidance for good timing, but keep in mind that your community might require a different time slot than general audiences.

○ If you're running a paid campaign, **be careful of how you set the budget.** Set daily limits or cap the cost of a single click.

The city of Lokeren creates engaging social media posts

The Belgian city of Lokeren has managed to create substantial engagement on their participation platform. With the help of a significant communications campaign and a new team member fully dedicated to participation, the number of registered users on the platform has **increased with almost 400% in 4 months**.

As a part of their campaign, Lokeren shared Facebook posts with quotes of ambassadors, aiming to convince citizens to share their ideas on the platform. These posts didn't only get sufficient attention through likes, but also were shared multiple times, which improved their overall reach.

Success factor 1 | Keep it local. The posts show local ambassadors, like the President of the Youth Council, which speaks to the community. Moreover, one of the ambassadors' posts was shared on his birthday, which offers an excellent opportunity for more engagement.

Success factor 2 | Stick to one visual identity. The posts are aligned with the visual identity used on the city's platform. That way, they create a coherent and consistent message and make sure that citizens will recognise and remember it more easily.

Success factor 3 | Have a clear call to action. All posts have the same call to action, which is visualised with a button encouraging citizens to share their ideas on the platform.

The social media posts of the City of Lokeren in Dutch. Each of them contain similar elements, like the Ambassadors picture, their quote and a call to action for people to share their ideas on "denkmee.lokeren.be" (the URL).

Top **offline** channels

Although your platform is online, it's essential to promote it equally through offline communication channels. That is how you engage citizens who may not be actively using social media, e-mail or city websites. You can also share the platform and its URL at offline events, neighbourhood meet-ups, and city councils, to reach communities that are not always connected.

The goal of using both online and offline is to increase inclusivity. How can you make sure older and digital illiterate citizens are included in your projects? You can **offer assistance in public places** to help them add their ideas to the platform. The Belgium municipality of Londerzeel had dedicated a corner of the local library to this. In the Belgian town of Marche-en-Famenne, municipal employees helped citizens navigate the platform in the town hall.

It also helps to add your URL in print materials you distribute throughout the community, such as newsletters, flyers in public spaces, in the library, stickers at the local bar, etc. Remember to personalise your URL, so your audience can easily recall it.

1. Press

Involving local press when launching the platform (newspaper journalists, but also radio or television) is a traditional but efficient way to reach more people. Send a press release at all the important moments; not only when the platform launches, but also when decisions are announced, when a new project phase starts, and when ideas start being implemented.

Make a **list of the press outlet**s you could reach out to. Think of local magazines, news outlets, blogs, and local influencers. This will also depend on the nature of your participation project. If you're launching a consultation about a school or a park, this could for instance be interesting to a website that writes about family activities or education in the region. Is it about sports facilities? Maybe reaching out to sports clubs can lead to something!w

CASE STUDY

Mons shares regular updates via local press

Mons is the capital of the Walloon province of Hainaut and has over 95,000 inhabitants. At the launch of their platform "Demain Mons" (Mons Tomorrow), they made good use of the local press to stimulate citizens to reflect on the future vision of the city. In total, the platform reached 12,000 inhabitants, and more than 850 ideas were submitted.

The fact that Mons has good local press relations helped their communications campaign tremendously. The press coverage on the platform went beyond local news; regional news channels also covered the launch. **The communications department kept providing regular feedback via the press**, in such a way that the platform stayed active at any time. For example, they shared the interim results publicly and in their feedback, highlighted ideas and clearly explained how these would be implemented in the policy.

2. Letters

Email campaigns are super effective, but how about sending a letter to your citizens directly? The invitation to join your platform arrives on your citizens' doormat, increasing the likelihood of them at least receiving your information. Due to the ease of a simple click-through, emails often result in more engagement. But letters ensure that you inform all citizens about your new platform and the opportunity to participate.

CASE STUDY

The Dutch municipality Leiden sends out letters

The municipality of Leiden wanted to invite a particular neighbourhood to visit the platform and think along on the restructuring of a local park. To do so, Leiden asked this specific neighbourhood to voice their opinion by sending out letters. The project is still ongoing, but in a short amount of time, almost **3.000 citizens registered**.

3. Partners

Information travels sideways. Because when a peer recommends something, it immediately adds credibility. Due to their personal network in your community, local partners and ambassadors can be great catalysts for your platform. So take time to consider the following: which ambassadors can you involve in getting the word out on your project?

Knokke-Heist involves 11 ambassadors

The Belgian municipality of Knokke-Heist launched its participation platform through the 'Breinstorm' campaign. At first, the municipality shared a few of their own ideas to get the conversation going, and then asked citizens to contribute their ideas. The catchy name 'Breinstorm' (A wordplay regarding Brainstorm in Dutch) made it easy to remember the platforms' name and find it online.

The city also invested in various other channels to spread the word about the platform, such as flyers or beer cards. Last but not least, a diverse group of 11 locally famous citizens became the ambassadors of the campaign. They contributed to raising awareness about the platform by posting about it on their own channels and talking about it to their peers.
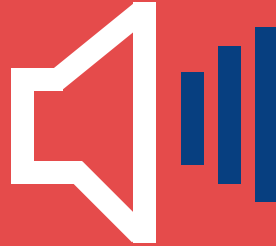
Lokeren involves young influencer

The Belgian city of Lokeren teamed up with a young, local influencer. That way, they managed to raise awareness for the platform in a **different age group.** The influencer Nicolas Baeke, who has a large following on Instagram, posted about the platform, urging his followers to share ideas for the city.

Tips to **launch** your platform

1. Create buzz with a kick-off event

It's a cliché, but it's true: a good start is half the battle. The best way to draw attention to your platform immediately is by launching it in such a way that your community cannot miss the message. If your community hears about your platform in its first week, all messaging after will serve as a reminder, which makes it more likely for them to become curious and get engaged.

But how do you get that dream started? In many cases, it helps if (local) media outlets cover your launch, and a kick-off event can be a great way to achieve this! We're not talking about a quick press conference, but **an actual moment to engage with your community or highlight a unique aspect of your project**. This can result in organic word-of-mouth. Coming up with a creative concept is easier said than done, but not impossible.

Kortrijk is the Belgian city with a knack for kick-off events

The city of Kortrijk successfully launched large participation projects with kick-off events twice:

1. Kortrijk launched its "Great Questioning" campaign at the city's New Year reception. 5.000 citizens attended this event, which made it a perfect occasion to introduce the community to the project. Moreover, as the event in itself got media attention, it immediately ensured press coverage as well!

2. Kortrijk organized a digital referendum that allowed citizens to vote on the idea of a monthly car-free Sunday in the city centre. Due to the (potential) impact of this project, and the fact that it was the first

digital Referendum in Belgium, the referendum received a lot of attention from the start. However, the city did not take this involvement for granted! **A unique element** of this local referendum was that citizens from the age of 16 (or older) were allowed to vote, while regular elections require a minimum age of 18 years. To draw attention to this fact, the referendum was launched at a high school. 5th and 6th graders received a presentation and had the honour to be the first voters - a great way to give your community something to talk about!

2. Have a clear campaign & visual identity

Especially when your platform is new, it will highly benefit from being **recognisable**. You will share the news on different channels, and so will ambassadors and press. This makes it all the more important to create a coherent story via keywords and a clear visual identity. Consistency is key here; use similar visuals in both online and offline campaigns, which also requires less effort for your team. By investing time into creating a clear visual identity before your platform launch, you make it a lot easier for your team to maintain consistency throughout the campaign.

Leuven had a colourful, consistent & clear visual identity

Leuven collaborated with a local communications agency to ensure that their campaign was truly tailored to the one and only right audience: their community. The designed visual identity eventually had a starring role in social media posts, YouTube videos (in Dutch but you can turn on subtitles), and posters. The campaign to gather ideas for the city's strategic planning was a huge success; more than **3.000 participants, 2.331 ideas and 31.492 votes** ended up informing the local policy.

Are you looking for a communications agency to support your campaign? We recommend working with a **local agency**. They will have the best understanding of your community and are thus most equipped to inform your campaign according to your audience!

3. Share first results quickly to boost engagement

Utilise the momentum around your launch. Did you get press attention? Are community groups talking about your platform? Are citizens registering? Make sure they stay engaged. One way to do so, is by ensuring new information is available soon after the launch.

A quick follow-up on all the initial messages, ensures the project is still fresh in the mind of citizens, and we've experienced you can boost engagement by sharing your first results quickly after the start. **It offers an opportunity for new citizens to get involved**, but also engages your community with the progress and shows the participant that their voice matters.

Kortrijk shares first results to increase engagement

The Belgian city of Kortrijk launched its citizen participation platform with a bang. Via a mix of emails, social media announcements and explicit support from local political figures, more than 600 accounts were created over the first three weeks. Yet, the city didn't stop there: after these first weeks, Kortrijk launched the second round of communications to share the first results it had gathered and to highlight some citizens' contributions. It gave the platform a second boost; a new peak in account creation was reached in the weeks that followed.

4. Give context & information on the platform

When citizens arrive on your platform for the first time, there should be sufficient information for them to understand the context. What are the goals of the platform? Which projects can they participate in? Where can they find more information on the policy areas covered in the projects?

Your goal is to not only ask your community for something, but also to **give something back**. Give citizens the opportunity to learn more about your projects and the relevant policy areas. Definitely make the detailed, official documents available as a point of reference but also consider **how you can convey this information in a more engaging way**. Can you make an infographic? Can you record a video of your mayor or councillor sharing essential information and objectives? Especially if you're looking for citizen input regarding complex policy topics, providing this context per project can help to inspire your citizens to think about the topics in question.

Medemblik shares videos to provide context

The Dutch municipality Medemblik recently launched a survey on its participation platform about **natural gas-free living**. To ensure that citizens have an informed opinion about this issue, Medemblik decided to provide the background information in short videos.

The municipality created an **animated video** outlining why it's essential for households to transition to natural gas free-living, and shared **an interview with its sustainability councillor**. Citizens now receive the main information in an easy and engaging way, which can encourage them to participate and ensures that they have all the information from the get-go.

5. Show it's serious, show political support

Another way to draw attention to your platform is by having politicians share **personal messages** about the project. This appeal speaks to citizens directly, not only because the posts are shared from personal accounts, but also as it directly illustrates the importance of the project. **Sharing videos with a call to action from individual accounts** will lead to a broader online reach for your campaign, and shows your community that their (elected) leaders are supporting the platform. Herein, it can contribute to building trust.

CASE STUDY

From Brussels and Vancouver to Chili

Multiple partners in our network benefited from sharing via personal videos or messaging from politicians, mayors or councillors that call for citizens should participate on the platform.
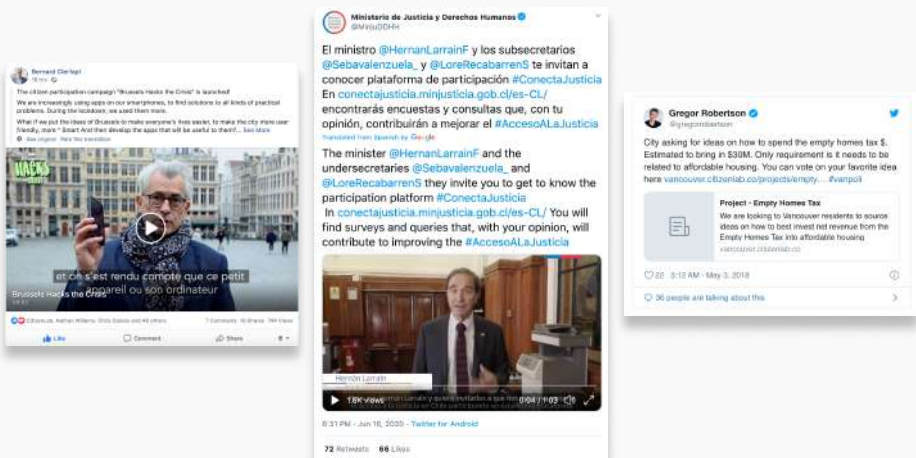
6. Track traffic and identify what works best for you

Promoting your platform on multiple channels is good - understanding what to prioritise and which channels are most efficient is even better. Free tracking tools like **Google Analytics** can help you understand at a glance which of your marketing efforts is paying off, and which channels have the best return on investment.

In order to set up Google Analytics, you'll need to deploy a line of code on your website. Once that's done, the tool will automatically detect and keep a record of traffic sources, allowing you to check where traffic is coming from and what pages are being looked at the most. .

Tips to keep your platform relevant

1. Share updates, updates, updates

Even after you launch, there is enough to say and share about your platform. Although you should not start spamming citizens with emails, social media can be a great tool to share regular updates. What is the current status of a project? Which ideas are popular? What are the newest ideas? Do you agree with this idea? What happens when the project is moving into a new phase? How does your administration feel about the (first) weeks of the project? By **sharing insights, specific ideas, or clear calls to action** on social media, in your existing newsletters, and via partners, you can inspire citizens to engage with your platform.

Vancouver organizes civilian budget around vacant tax

The Canadian City of Vancouver shared all the 'most viewed' ideas via social media and asked followers what they thought of that particular idea. T**his action-oriented call about one specific idea or project led to much better results than a generic request for ideas.**

2. Spend time on communicating results

The biggest mistake you can make is to assume your project is finished once you have the results. **Your participation project is only finished when your citizens have the results.**

Firstly, your results should always be easily accessible on the platform itself. You can share official, detailed documents as a point of reference, but also make sure a short and sweet summary is available for citizens who aren't keen to read full reports. State the biggest impact, results or ideas clearly, for instance in bullet points on your

platform. Secondly, create an infographic containing the best or most surprising outcomes of your project. Or share a word cloud to visualise recurring themes. If you manage to **capture the information visually**, this serves as excellent content for social media, press, and partners, which ensures that the message is picked up by a larger audience. Thirdly, you can consider recording a short video with a councillor, active citizen, or someone from the project team on how they perceived the process and the results.

Feel free to get creative with sharing these results. Also **consider how you can follow up on the actual implementation of ideas**. Even if it requires some time, communicate on your platform once an idea or outcome of a project has actually been implemented. This shows citizens that you take their input seriously, which may encourage them to participate in future projects.

Rueil Malmaison shows implementation of participatory budget

In 2019, the French municipality Rueil Malmaison hosted a participatory budget on their participation platform. More than 650 citizens participated, sharing 156 ideas and 470 comments. Since then, the platform has hosted over 16 participatory projects, which boosted the number of registered users to over 5.000. Rueil remains still shares updates on the implementations following the participatory budget, such as outside sports opportunities.

3. Always have one active project

When citizens come to your platform, **there should always be an opportunity to participate**. Why else would they return? Ideally, there are multiple active projects going on at once, but in reality, this will not be feasible for every council. Participation projects require a lot of internal preparation, commitment, and coordination, so you can't just start one for the sake of having one. If you have an active project, but it's in a phase where citizen input is not required, **explicitly state when the next step will start**. That way, citizens know when to come back to share their ideas or learn more about the results.

Recently, we added a feature on the CitizenLab platform that helps to ensure ongoing activity on your platform: **citizen proposals**. Citizen proposals offer an "open idea-box" for citizens, outside the scope and time frame of your ongoing project. Here, citizens can share their ideas on any topic at any time, and gather votes from within the community. As a council, you are still in control by establishing the threshold of votes that is needed before action is required. Decide what you'll commit to once the threshold is reached. Will you give official feedback? Invite the authors to explain their idea further in a personal meeting? Or discuss the proposal at your council meeting?

From our experience, citizen proposals boost the engagement on your platform. Citizens are excited to share their own ideas and often comment on each other's ideas, which creates a stronger community on your platform. Citizen proposals **offer your citizens a continuous opportunity to participate and engage with ideas from the community**.

Citizen Initiatives lead to an increase in engagement on the platform of Linz

Linz, the third biggest city of Austria, managed to boost the engagement rates on their platform by allowing citizens to share their own proposals. Next to the ongoing projects, the community can now share their ideas for the city. If an idea gets 30 votes within 60 days, Linz invites the author(s) to discuss their idea at the town hall and meet with related experts to work on a plan.

In no time, the city received 23 unique citizen proposals, 4 of which reached the set threshold. **The first proposal** - new benches for the city centre - **is currently being implemented**, as Linz is eager to show their community that they take citizen proposals seriously.

4. Commit to giving feedback

Besides giving updates about the general trends on your platform, it is impactful to respond to individual ideas. Citizens took the time and effort to share their idea, so try to make the time to reply to them. In doing so, you will contribute to **a more direct dialogue**. Replying to all ideas may not be feasible, depending on the size of your team and the number of ideas you receive. However, it is the best way to show citizens that you are listening to them. If giving direct feedback to all ideas is not realistic, try to at least reply to the most popular ideas, or certain theme's that pop-up more often.

Leuven receives 2,331 ideas and manages to give feedback to 96%

The Belgian city of Leuven committed to giving feedback to citizens' ideas for the city's strategic planning. After a strong campaign, the city received 2,331 ideas. Over the course of the summer, the city managed to give official feedback to 96% of the ideas shared on the platform. This took a lot of commitment and input from the team, but it truly contributed to citizens' positive sentiment after the project.

Conclusion

Clarity, continuity, and diversity: these three key principles will guide your communication strategy and help you launch your participation platform regardless of your budget.

Likely, a lot of the suggestions we shared in this guide crossed your mind before. Either you considered them yourself, or you have seen other cities choosing this approach. Unfortunately, none of these tips are the golden rule. However, when you put in a continuous effort and manage to mix and match the tips and communication channels, we believe you will end up with a strong campaign.

Although it's splendid to increase the visibility of your platform, remember that the number of contributions you gather on the platform isn't the only success metric for your project. Sometimes, fewer contributions still mean (more) qualitative input! Defining the type of contributions you want to receive will help to refine your message and to target the right channels.

Clarity   Continuity

Diversity
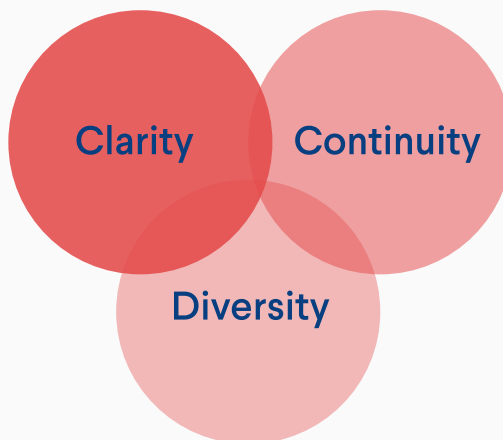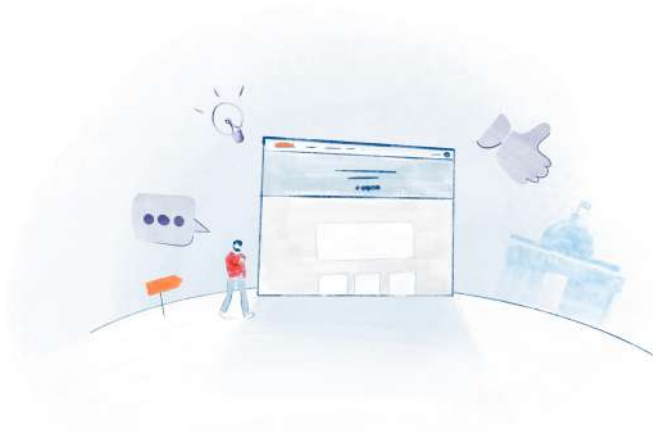
Want to engage your community online?
We're here to help!

CitizenLab has worked with **+150 local governments** on online citizen engagement and launching a participation platform. **The platform offers a mix of participation methods**, allowing you to customize and utilize the toolbox differently per project. We're happy to walk you through all the functionalities of the platform and discuss how it could support your councils' participation ambitions.

Schedule a free demo of the platform

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