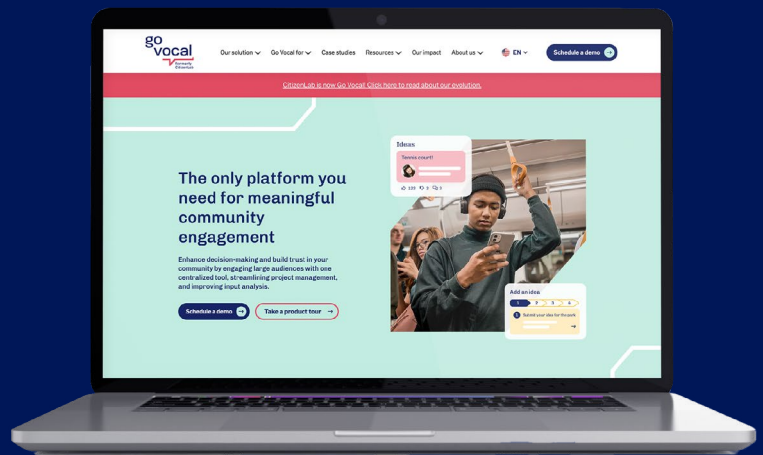


2021

Impact Report

CitizenLab is now Go Vocal! [Click here to read about our evolution.](#)

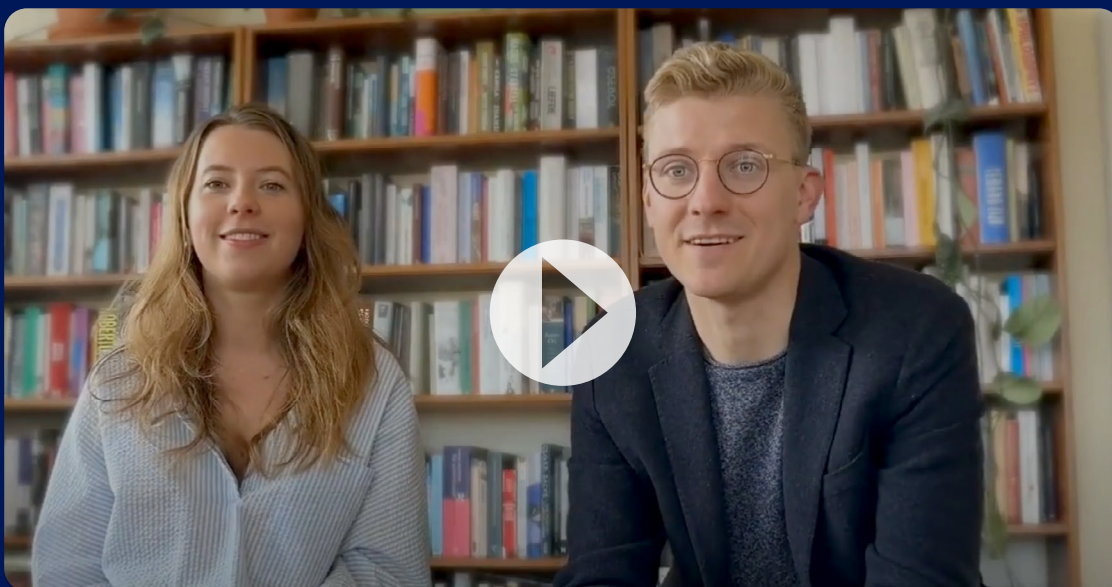
CitizenLab becomes Go Vocal!



What does the ideal world look like for you?

Here's ours. Imagine a world where governments tackle complex issues with confidence and unity. A world where community members actively participate in shaping solutions to challenges like balancing development and sustainability, building representative infrastructure, and cultivating a vibrant place where everyone feels a sense of belonging.

This vision hinges on trust. Trust that our governments are working for their residents, and trust that communities will speak up to advocate for their and others' needs. To achieve this, public servants, as true drivers of positive change, have been working their hardest to bridge the gap with residents. While there are challenges, there is also a strong desire on both sides to shape better communities, together. It is through fostering meaningful and efficient engagement that we can fully tap into the power of the community and its collective intelligence to create lasting positive impacts.



Making community engagement more accessible and decision-making more participatory

Determined to become architects of systemic change, CitizenLab was born. Our team addressed the critical issue of building trust between governments and residents with an innovative digital community engagement solution.

Initially met with skepticism, our relentless pursuit of impact and empowerment has made us the go-to partner for forward-thinking governments worldwide. And we didn't stop at just providing a tool. We have been actively shaping the industry by defining best practices, constantly refining our platform, and exploring new ways to enhance engagement processes.





From democracy and citizen lab to the centerpiece of a strong local democracy

Since CitizenLab's start in 2016, we've empowered over 1 million community members and helped 500+ local governments and organizations foster a culture of engagement for more inclusive decision-making. Welcoming and supporting all of you on your journeys has been truly inspiring!

Today, that democracy lab we once started out as no longer defines us. We've grown beyond our beginnings as an ideation tool and have become a centerpiece for local democracy, empowering communities to go vocal and be involved in local decisions, whether it's through online or offline participation, and empowering governments with the tools for efficient, inclusive, data-driven decision-making.

It's time to step into our new identity, one that reflects the partner we have become. A partner who enables you to foster meaningful and efficient engagement and helps you translate valuable community input into lasting positive impact.

We're Go Vocal



Introduction

In 2015, we launched CitizenLab with one goal in mind: to make decision-making more participatory, inclusive, and responsive. Now, CitizenLab has been around for 6 years and we are incredibly proud of everything we've already achieved: 300+ governments have used our platform to engage their communities online, we've grown from a team of three to 40, and we've scaled from one country to six. And yet, we still have so many plans to expand our impact and design new participation models!


When we started CitizenLab we set out to answer: why should participation in public decisions be limited to a handful of people who've got the time and (admirable) dedication to attend a town hall meeting? Back then, many governments weren't yet convinced of the value of public participation. Thankfully, participation has evolved and over the past few years, we have witnessed first-hand how governments have transformed their beliefs and way of working. Mayors have embraced the paradigm shift from a closed democracy to an open democracy: they are increasingly aware of the need for inclusive and participatory decision-making to legitimize their policies and gain trust from their communities. We no longer need to explain why we should do citizen participation, but rather the burning question for governments nowadays is: how do we better organize the dialogue with our residents online?

The COVID-19 pandemic has only accelerated this digital make-over. It's been a transformative period both for the governments we work with and also for our team at CitizenLab. We've started working in several new countries, having suddenly gained the ability to meet governments on the other side of the world. With all of this cross-border learning and an acceleration in government adoption of community engagement, we're also refined what we want our impact to be.

We're proud of the projects we've been able to support over the last year -projects that have pushed the bar higher on how participatory, inclusive, and responsive governments' community engagement efforts should be. In this report, we reflect on the impact these projects have had and how they have helped shape our ambitious goals for the following year.

Here's to even more participation in 2022,

Aline, Koen, & Wietse



What will you find in this report?

p.07 CitizenLab's mission and the theory of change

p.08 Measuring impact: what we've learned

p.09 Supporting more participatory decision-making

Higher quality of input

More participatory agenda-setting

Higher process quality

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More participants in the process

More representative group of participants

Higher engagement among participants

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Better feedback after participation

More officials listen to their community

More efficient input processing

p.22 Goals for 2022

■ ■ ■ CitizenLab's mission and the theory of change

We recently developed a comprehensive theory of change that lines up with **our mission to build stronger democracies by making public decision-making more inclusive, participatory, and responsive.**

Three principles make up the backbone of our framework. They include:

01

Building on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

As the best universal standards out there. In particular, we focused on SDG 16.7 to “ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels”, since that’s exactly the type of impact we’re trying to create at CitizenLab.

02

Looking beyond quantity and also measuring quality.

While it’s important to look at how many people participate in engagement processes, that only tells us how many people had a say -it doesn’t say anything about the influence they had on actual decisions. That’s why we measure both.

03

Tracking progress continuously

And using it as our company’s compass. While we use an annual survey to hear from community members and governments that have used our platform, we don’t stop there -we also evaluate progress on a monthly basis.

And with that, our Impact Measurement Framework breaks down into:



**Input for more
participatory
decision-making**

OUTCOMES:

- Higher quality of input
- More participatory agenda-setting
- Higher quality of process



Process for more
inclusive decision-
making

OUTCOMES:

- More participants in the process
- More representative group of participants
- Higher engagement among participants



Output for more
responsive
decision-making

OUTCOMES:

- Better feedback after participation
- More officials listening to their community
- More efficient input processing

Measuring impact: what we've learned

When measuring CitizenLab's impact, we look at how participatory decision-making was across our platform's projects, how inclusive decision-making processes were in various communities, and to what extent the decisions made by governments were responsive to community input.

To fully gauge the impact of our work, we turned to our clients with a series of questions to hear directly from them on these three indicators. After hearing back from 50% of the governments we work with, we determined that **we had the highest impact on making decision-making more participatory.**

Over

2,000

**community
engagement projects**
were launched on
CitizenLab platforms
in 2021!

So what does this look like in practice?



Supporting more **participatory** decision-making

CitizenLab's impact starts with engaging more people and having more officials listen. Using our platform, governments have seen a **12x increase in resident engagement and 88% of their team engage more often with their community.** Whether a government chooses to consult, involve, collaborate with, or empower their residents through community engagement, offering the option helps build trust. In fact, residents who engage report **56% higher trust in local government.**

To measure our impact on making decision-making more participatory, we look at the following three outcomes.

01 HIGHER QUALITY OF INPUT

Here we ask deeper questions about the input received. We look at:

- **Relevance** | does it respond to the prompt by the city?
- **Justification** | Does it provide argumentation/reasoning (the “why”)?
- **Specificity** | Do they indicate how the idea should be implemented (the “how”)?
- **Language** | Is the language positively & productively oriented?

So far, the input and feedback across CitizenLab platforms score highest on **relevance & productive** language. A high percentage of community members respond to their city’s prompts (rather than submitting a random thought or idea), and frame their idea in a positive and productive manner. In the coming year, we’ll also work on helping guide people to provide more supporting argumentation and reasoning around their ideas, giving cities a better way to understand the context and values behind them.



This is what surprised us the earliest: people are not content to say “I like / I do not” but they support their comments and even negative comments are constructive.”

La Fondation Rurale de Wallonie (Belgium)

A QUICK EXAMPLE

La Fondation Rurale de Wallonie (Belgium)

A publicly funded foundation that works together with rural municipalities in Wallonia. Their project with the Municipality of Perwez focuses on the development of their PCDR, otherwise known as the Communal Rural Development Program. Using their online community engagement platform, they present the 34 projects that make up their PCDR and ask key stakeholders to provide comments on these plans, and encourage them to be as constructive as possible.



02 MORE PARTICIPATORY AGENDA-SETTING

Many governments recognized the importance of opening their political agendas to the community, and they used our proposals feature to encourage bottom-up participation. This encouraged residents to submit ideas for improvements to their local government/ services, thereby shifting power away from traditionally top-down engagement processes. Proposals provide real value by increasing participation on engagement platforms, encouraging more active forms of participation, and getting highly localized ideas in front of local governments.

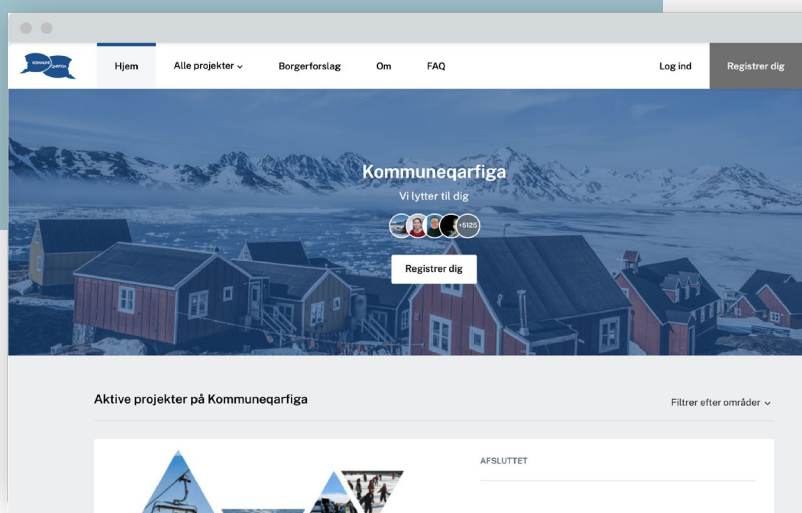
In 2021, **25 cities** used the feature for bottom-up engagement and received over

600
proposals

A QUICK EXAMPLE

City of Nuuk (Greenland) and City of San Isidro (Peru)

Around the world, bottom-up agenda setting is really encouraging for communities and tends to increase participation. In Nuuk, Greenland & San Isidro, Peru the use of our proposals feature helped drive up the number of registered and participating community members to approximately **5,000 participants per platform!**



03 HIGHER PROCESS QUALITY

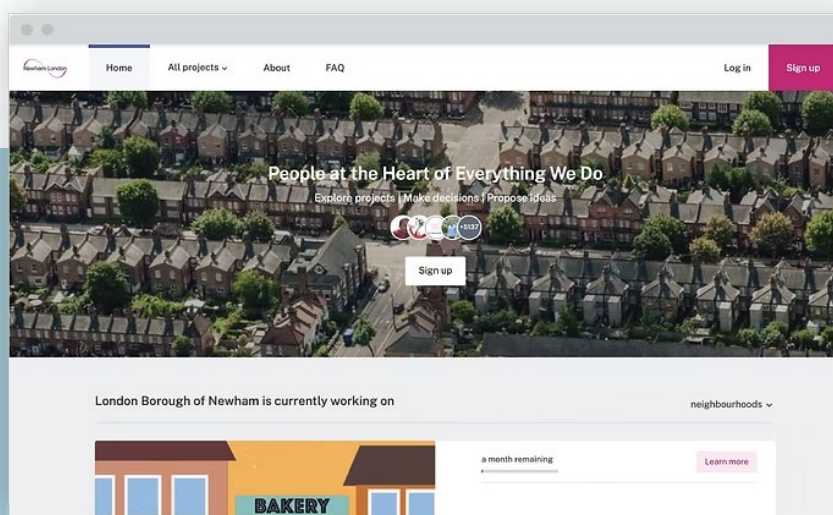
Community engagement can't simply be done to check a box. It should be intentional, and meaningful. So, we also look at the quality of engagement processes for the projects launched on our platform. Here's how we score quality (in order of importance):

1. **Continuous or on a timeline:** (number of) phases
2. **Stake:** chosen method defines degree of influence
3. **Responsiveness:** presence of future phases
4. **Transparency:** enough visual information is provided
5. **Internal organisation:** presence of project moderator
6. **Events:** synchronous events are planned and shown

A QUICK EXAMPLE

London Borough of Newham (United Kingdom)

So what do good qualitative processes look like? In the UK, Newham launched community assemblies open to all residents and invited them to submit ideas for key priorities the city should work on for each neighborhood. They first opened the process to all residents of the different neighborhoods, then worked with smaller working groups to process the input received, then returned to the full community with the final ideas. By doing this, they were able to engage more people and come to meaningful conclusions at the same time.





Supporting more **inclusive** decision-making

Traditionally, many people have found it difficult to participate in community engagement initiatives, which often didn't account for varied work hours, caretaking responsibilities, language access, and a wide range of other barriers. This often meant that the diverse perspectives of community members were left out of the decision-making process. But today there are more intentional processes being put in place, including with digital engagement, to ensure that decision-making is more inclusive. More people participating means we helped governments reach higher rates of representativeness, getting closer to more inclusive and equitable decision-making.

To measure our impact on making decision-making more inclusive, we look at the following three outcomes.

01 MORE PARTICIPANTS IN THE PROCESS

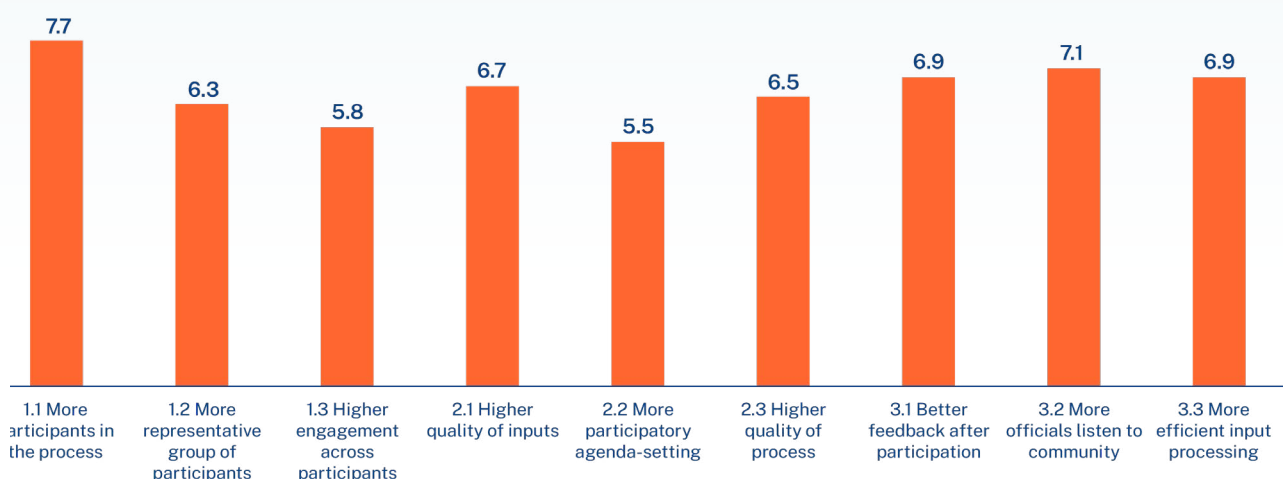
With digital engagement leading to 51% more participation on average. This means governments can move away from echo chambers of the same 10 individuals who participate, and hear from a more representative makeup of their community. And while meaningful engagement is about more than just high numbers of participants, efforts to get more participants into the process can also lead to better representation.

Digital engagement with CitizenLab leads to

12x
more participation
on average

Average rating of impact outcomes

0=strongly disagree, 10=strongly agree



The CitizenLab platform helps to engage more participants in decision-making processes.”

City of Utrecht (the Netherlands)



02 MORE REPRESENTATIVE GROUP OF PARTICIPANTS

While we, and the governments who use our platform, are very conscientious of the personal data we gather, we also find it really important to measure the diversity of participants engaging with their governments to ensure better representation. Whether a local government aims to include more community members from different ethnicities, religions, socio-economic statuses, etc. governments that want to reach a more representative group of their community have utilized different strategies, such as combining online and offline methods of engagement, translating materials or including interpreters at events, communicating about their projects through different community leaders and community groups, and more.

In the City of Goes (the Netherlands), $\frac{2}{3}$ rds of their

3,200

platform participants said they hadn't ever participated in a city's engagement process before.

Digital engagement helps governments reach more youth, with

60%

of participants on CitizenLab's platforms are younger than 45

03 HIGHER ENGAGEMENT AMONG PARTICIPANTS

We don't just want to know whether more people made their voice heard because of our platform, we also want to know whether the engagement was deeper and more deliberative (also referred to as "thick engagement"). More deliberative methods of engagement on our platform can include proposals and participatory budgeting to empower communities, or ideation and online workshops to collaborate with residents.

Here's an overview of our platform's most popular engagement methods, in order of popularity:

702,871

Input collection
(inputs, votes, & comments)

283,994

Consultation
(surveys & polls)

33,788

Workshops
(participants)

25,478

Participatory budgeting
(baskets)

6,025

Initiatives

CONSULT



SURVEY



POLLS

INVOLVE



OPTION
ANALYSIS



MAPPING

COLLABORATE



IDEATION



ONLINE
WORKSHOPS

EMPOWER



PROPOSALS



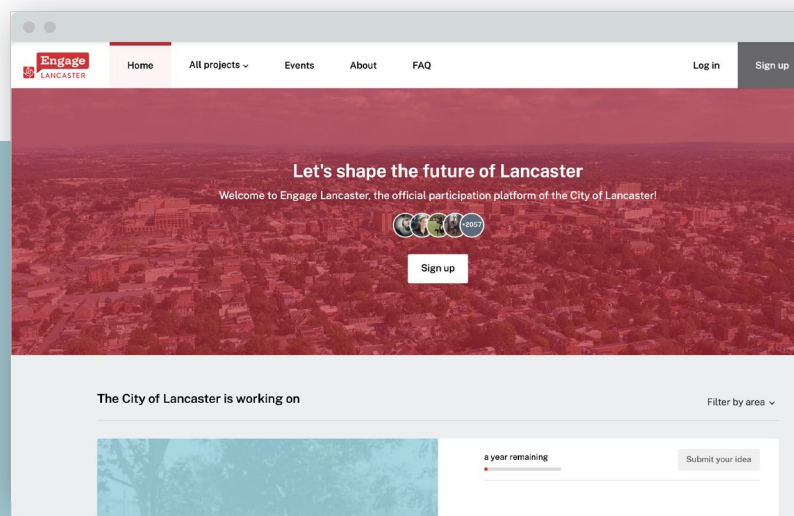
PARTICIPATORY
BUDGETING

Our greatest impact, and the greatest interaction among community members, came from projects that focused on **collaboration** through ideation and online workshops, and **involvement** through option analysis and mapping.

A QUICK EXAMPLE

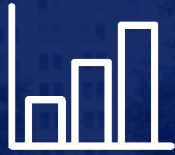
City of Lancaster (United States)

The City of Lancaster’s engagement team incorporated traditional engagement methods and merging them with online engagement options, **the platform launched with 13x the participants compared to the “usual suspects” who attend town hall meetings. Today, the Engage Lancaster platform has over 2,000 registered participants** contributing ideas, input, votes, and comments that will shape the future of their community. What’s more, a large percentage of these new participants belong to minority groups and are usually underrepresented in these conversations.



We did see positive and productive interaction on our Fairground Avenue Park project. Participants were bouncing ideas off of one another when sharing their thoughts about the different equipment. This ultimately did help our designer in coming up with his preliminary designs for the space.”

Borough of Carlisle (United States)



Supporting more responsive decision-making

It's one thing for governments to launch community engagement projects and for community members to participate. But when it comes to closing the feedback loop, governments also need to share better feedback with their community members after participation and show how their input has (or has not) influenced decision-making.

To measure our impact on making decision-making more responsive, we look at the following three outcomes.

01 BETTER FEEDBACK AFTER PARTICIPATION



Feedback is key to showing people the importance of their engagement, thereby building trust in government and encouraging them to engage again in future processes. Some governments have done this by giving individual feedback to engaged community members throughout the process through status updates while others prefer to wait for projects to end before communicating out final results. By showing your community how their input impacted decision-making, you help build trust and encourage continuous participation.

More than

50%

of community input across governments' CitizenLab platforms received feedback within 3 months

More than

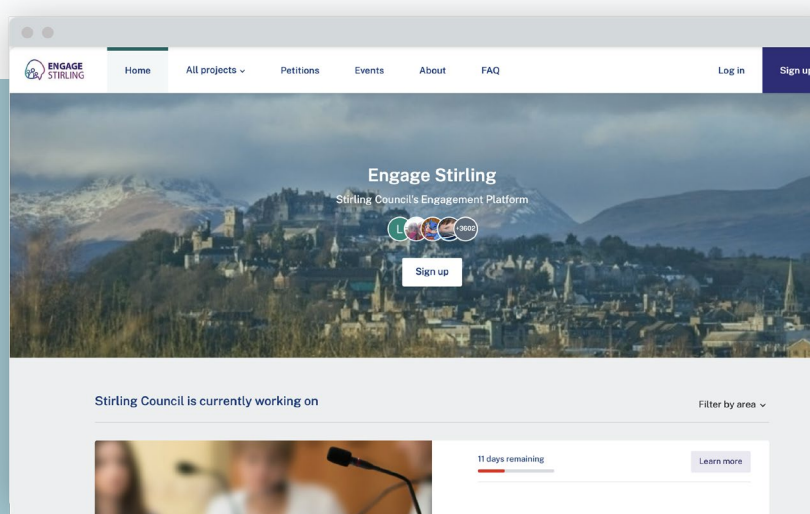
50%

of all finished projects communicated a decision to communities

A QUICK EXAMPLE

Stirling Council (United Kingdom) and City of Harderwijk (The Netherlands)

Feedback can be gathered and provided at various stages of your engagement process. Stirling Council, in the UK used a feedback survey to understand the community's experience using city services and they translated the survey results into a very clear and visual infographic for the public. In Harderwijk, the Netherlands, the city used resident feedback to draw up a visual concept of a new public square before turning it back over to the community for more input.



02 MORE OFFICIALS LISTEN TO THEIR COMMUNITY

Internal adoption and organization is key for civil servants and elected officials to be successful in their community engagement efforts. CitizenLab therefore focuses on getting as many internal stakeholders as possible on board, and doing so early on.



The CitizenLab platform helps to engage more. Our officials listen but cannot agree with all input. We have proposals enabled so our city council is committed to listening to those. It is very important to communicate why something is not possible and to keep the dialogue open. More impact when we have internal champions and when the timeline is clear and transparent”

City of Utrecht (the Netherlands)

In 2021 we had more than

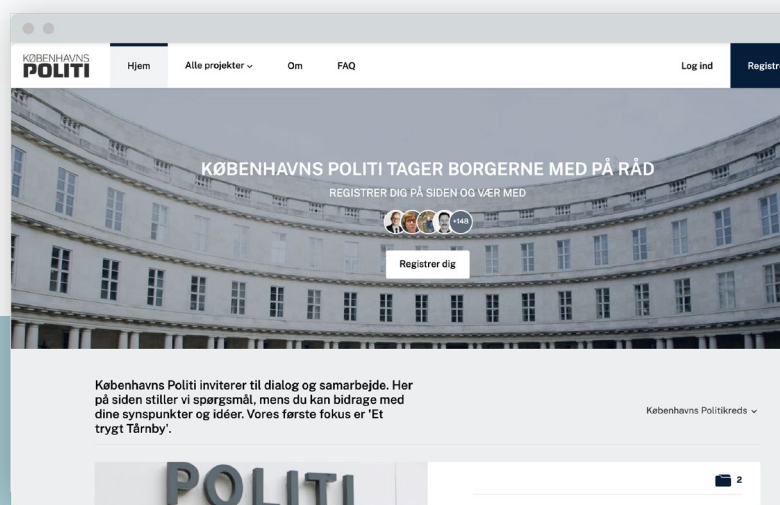
3,000

admins and project managers across all the platforms run by CitizenLab.

A QUICK EXAMPLE

Copenhagen Police (Denmark)

Policing is easily one of the most important yet contested community engagement topics. That’s why Copenhagen Police launched their Citizens’ Council and digital community engagement platform to collectively serve as a forum for dialogue and reflection between the city’s residents and its police department. The platform is intentionally set up to make it more personal by showing an introductory video and photos of the local officers in every project description to show who is listening from the department.



03 MORE EFFICIENT INPUT PROCESSING

Launching a community engagement initiative and collecting ideas and feedback is one thing - processing the input is another. To make it as easy and efficient as possible, CitizenLab's platform helps governments categorize, process, and analyze the ideas collected to identify which are most important for a community.

The Youth for Climate movement in Belgium was able to organize over

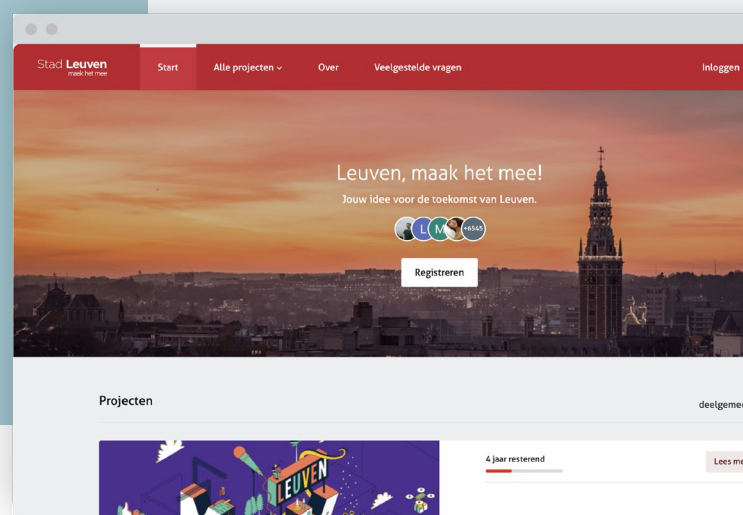
1,700

ideas into 15 clear, structured priority areas for policy makers to consider.

A QUICK EXAMPLE

City of Leuven (Belgium)

In the Belgian city of Leuven, CitizenLab's insights feature was utilized across different phases of the project. The City is constantly re-examining their main project where **they have collected over 2,000 ideas** in order to easily process input on specific topics, such as placement of public benches.



Want to measure your own impact?

We've got a guide to help you with that!

[Download guide](#)



Goals for 2022

Reflecting on our quantitative impact measurement shows **we had the greatest impact by helping governments make their decision-making more participatory**. We helped them launch more, and better, processes than would have been possible without the use of a digital engagement platform. In turn, the governments we worked with perceive the impact of their engagement efforts and platform highly because more community members participated in their initiatives and more officials have been listening to the public.

Reflecting on our 2021 impact, here's how we will further boost our impact in 2022:

- **More inclusive decision-making**

To ensure that decision-making is inclusive, it's important that many members from different communities are invited to participate. In the last year(s), the concept of DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) has become an indispensable principle to keep in mind when organizing community engagement.

In 2022, CitizenLab will further support governments trying to reach a more diverse audience. We'll do this by equipping our clients with more tools that will allow them to do targeted outreach based on the topic, scope, and project area. Second, we'll create integrations that will enable residents to share input through channels beyond the CitizenLab platform, such as via texting. Third, we will help decision makers weigh and prioritize input based on who's been participating, and who hasn't.

- **More participatory decision-making**

Engagement projects and processes form the building blocks of every engagement platform. Most residents are not interested directly in public decision-making itself, but are triggered to participate on a specific topic or issue they care about. Over the past years we have identified key use cases that increase engagement in communities for each of the countries in which we work. In 2022, we will deepen our expertise and build even better methodologies for these use cases. We will also keep expanding our engagement method toolbox with new tools, such as those for deliberation.

- **More responsive decision-making**

To incorporate community input into the decision making process, city management needs to receive relevant insights on who's participating and on what topics. That's why in 2022, we will further invest in actionable reporting and link to the long-term strategic plans of local governments. We will also enrich our own platform data by adding external data sources, both from public domains and from governments own data sources (as they allow).

Impact goals 2022



Inclusive

500,000+

engaged citizens



Participatory

5,000+

projects



Responsive

2,000+

decisions informed



Want to see the platform in action?

TALK TO US

govocal.com

hello@govocal.com



Request a
demo to see
the platform
in action

Written and Published by Go Vocal SA - Pachecolaan 34,
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