citizenlab

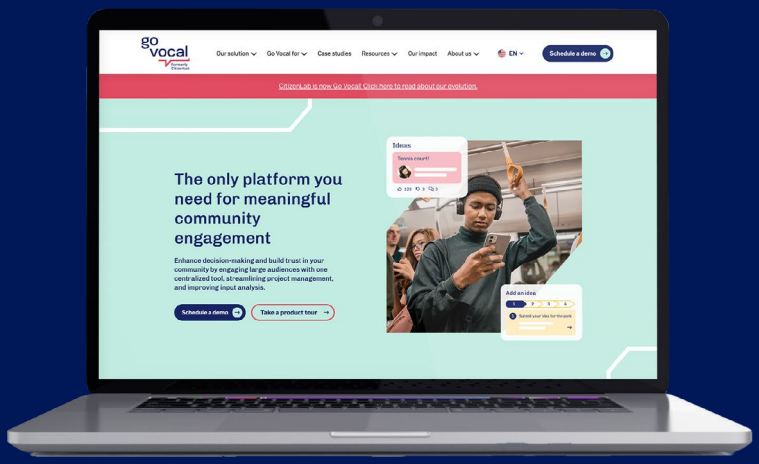
2023

Year in review

Discover the impact
we created together in 2023

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 Centrepiece 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 organisations 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 Centrepiece 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

Wietse Van Ransbeeck
CEO & Co-Founder

A reflection on 2023

2023 was a year of democratic innovation, both for our product and across the cities we work with around the world.

We had one of our biggest product development years since launching back in 2016.

> **With 23 very intentional product feature releases in 2023, I am prouder than ever of the robust community engagement platform that we offer.**

We focused heavily on delivering on our promise to support inclusive and representative engagement, building more flexibility into our offering with new features such as a Flexible Input Form (for more customised idea crowdsourcing) and embracing a shift from a digital solution to one that blends offline and online with features like Form Sync (which enables bringing input from paper forms for surveys and ideation projects to the digital platform via easy scanning).

Participation is only as helpful and useful as it has an impact on decisions and policies, and while there is still progress to be made in the GovTech sector, CitizenLab's team took big steps. In 2023, we introduced new features such as our Report Builder and a generative AI assistant to help get to insights faster and make reporting easier. In previous years, our focus with AI was mainly on grouping and summarising data. 2023 marked an exciting shift towards more human-centric developments to verify statements so that public

servants eager to harness AI's capabilities can do so while still retaining control with ethical use.

As our technology evolves, I'm especially excited about the impact it can have by helping to bring community participation to the forefront as a holistic value-add for decision-makers, rather than a one-off or project-based tactic. With the features we released, I feel that we are now at the point where we can focus more on influencing how those ingredients are used.

For instance, we closely partnered with our client, the City of Copenhagen, to implement our Proposals feature, which enables bottom-up engagement. Not only was this feature implemented, their political leadership actually pioneered using bottom-up engagement as a launch strategy to build community and encourage ambitious levels of diverse engagement - they hope to reach up to 20,000 residents through this initiative within the first year and a half.

In addition to supporting current clients' innovative engagement initiatives, we also grew our network and welcomed our 500th client, Montgomery County (USA)

It's exciting to see the participatory movement and network around us continue to grow, and in the coming years, we hope to deliver on and further grow how community engagement impacts decisions.

It's fair to say we've learned a lot in 2023, and the potential for 2024 to be a transformational year for global democracy is high. I believe that by sharing our experiences and learnings, we can collectively contribute to shaping a more vibrant and inclusive future for global democracy. Join us in this reflective exploration and be a part of the movement toward more meaningful participation.

Helping governments Centre community expertise

In 2023, we saw a shift towards more participatory processes and giving residents genuine influence on decision-making really establish itself firmly around the world. From an uptick in citizens' assemblies to embracing new technologies for community engagement, governments signaled their readiness to centre community expertise in their decision-making.

- Globally, citizen assemblies have been instrumental in offering advice on highly crucial matters like **assisted dying**. Similarly, at the community level, there has been a growing trend of municipalities tapping into the knowledge of local residents to resolve **intricate and long-standing challenges**.

- In a nod toward reaching more people by meeting them where they are and increasing the inclusivity of their consultations, one-third of processes organised in 2022 and 2023 were hybrid (online and in-person deliberation) (**source**).

- The appetite for participation, both on the part of communities and local governments, continued to grow in 2023. In fact, **People Powered's ranking** featured no less than 55 engagement tools, with ours ranking in the 2nd place.

- In December, the European Commission issued **recommendations for greater citizen and civil society participation** in public policy-making across EU member states and all levels of government.

Key figures: 2023 in numbers

21

number of countries we worked in

3,061

number of projects launched across platforms in 2023

2,788

number of projects completed across platforms in 2023

1,040

average number of public servants using the platform monthly

21,470

average number of monthly community member users across our platforms

What will you find in this report?

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Who we are

CitizenLab is made up of a dedicated team of innovators, strategists, and technologists committed to bringing democracy into the 21st century.

In 2023, our team focused on elevating our product to new heights, emphasizing inclusivity and operational excellence, more than ever

We released 23 new features in 2023 to supercharge inclusive engagement and operational excellence amongst open democracy practitioners!

In 2023, we placed the voices of our client community and their residents at the forefront, using their insights as our guiding star to shape our product roadmap. By blending client feedback and industry trends, we ensure our developments align closely with the needs and expectations of engagement practitioners. The product developments focused on a few core themes, including:

Operational excellence
to ensure that busy, resource-strapped local governments could maximise their efficiency and impact with the help of technology.

Flexibility
so local governments could create projects and pages that match their unique contexts.

Lowered barriers to engagement
offering community members ways to engage with their local government more easily and to kick off more inclusive, longer-term engagement journeys.

Our enhanced Events feature, for instance, significantly boosted engagement: *54% of event attendees had never contributed to their local authority's consultation before and 46% participated in other projects! This is the result of significant updates: simplifying sign-ups, enhancing promotion and discoverability, and facilitating better communication to maintain participant engagement.*

We've also brought ***anonymous verified participation, expanding voting methods****, as well as* ***improving discussion follow-up capabilities*** *to our platform. These enhancements are crucial in meeting residents at various stages of their engagement journey, whether they're just developing an interest in a topic or are ready to actively vote on an issue.*

Irene Pedruelo
Product Manager

We are working to make the link between events and consultations stronger by strengthening our offline/ online input collection mechanisms, via features like Form Sync, which will help transform opinions and input by residents captured offline into actionable online insights via OCR technology. Now, offline and online participation can both easily become part of analysis, reporting, and decision-making!

Irene Pedruelo
Product Manager

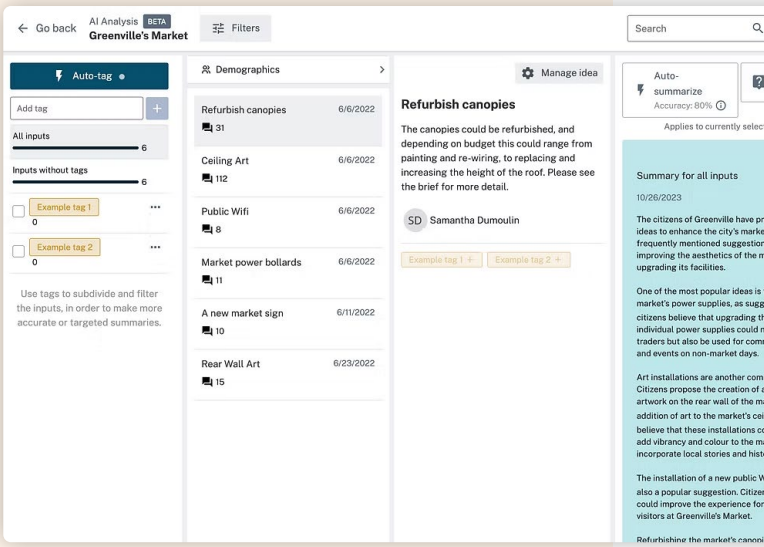
Impact on decision-making
to ensure that community members' engagement efforts had an impact on the decisions made through responsive governance.

Blended engagement
to embrace the growing need to offer both offline and online participation opportunities for local governments committed to inclusive and equitable community engagement.

A handful of the features that we released in 2023 to support these core areas included:

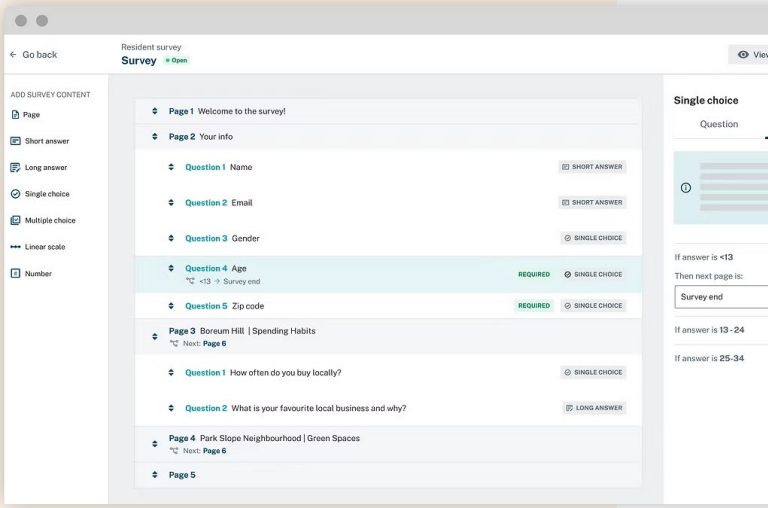
AI Assistant Socrates (operational excellence)

An AI-powered analysis tool to create better insights, faster, across the vast amounts of textual and quantitative data collected during the consultations our clients host with residents all over the world.



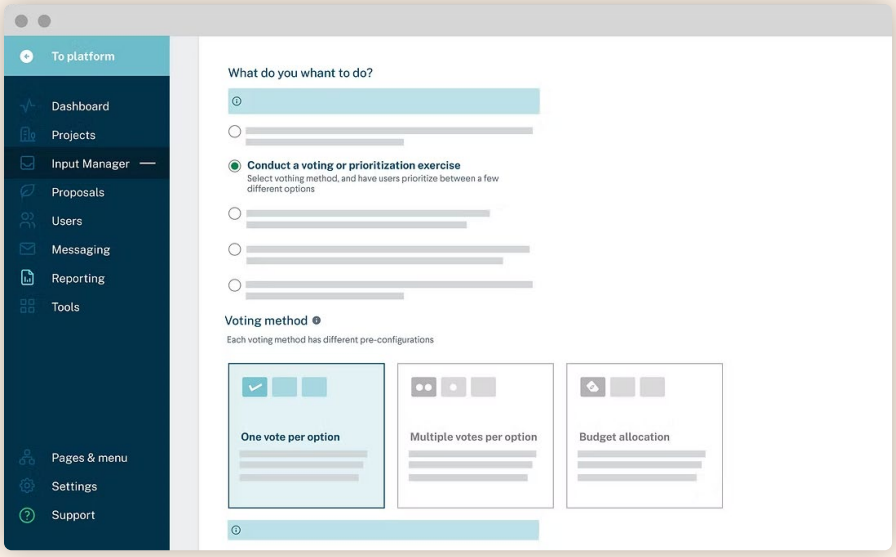
Flexible Input Form (flexibility)

Offering more flexibility for idea crowdsourcing, this refreshed form builder allows admins to customise the data they need to collect and guide community members to provide nuanced answers with options such as grouping questions, using images, and implementing a variety of question types (long-form, multiple choice, etc).



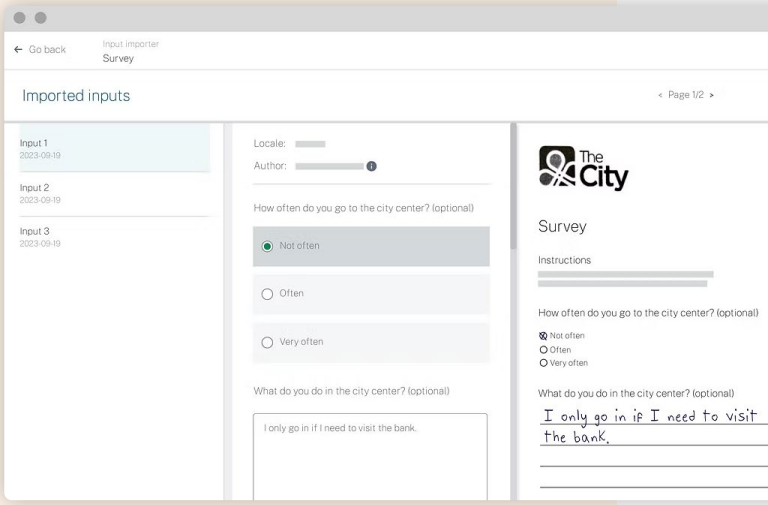
Voting Methods (lowered barriers to engagement)

We enhanced our voting toolkit by developing various methods for governments to engage with residents, gathering input on priorities through voting and option analysis. Whether it's the simplicity and accessibility of Approval Voting, the expressive power of Cumulative Voting, or the financial responsibility of Participatory Budgeting, each method offers unique value for a variety of decision-making scenarios.



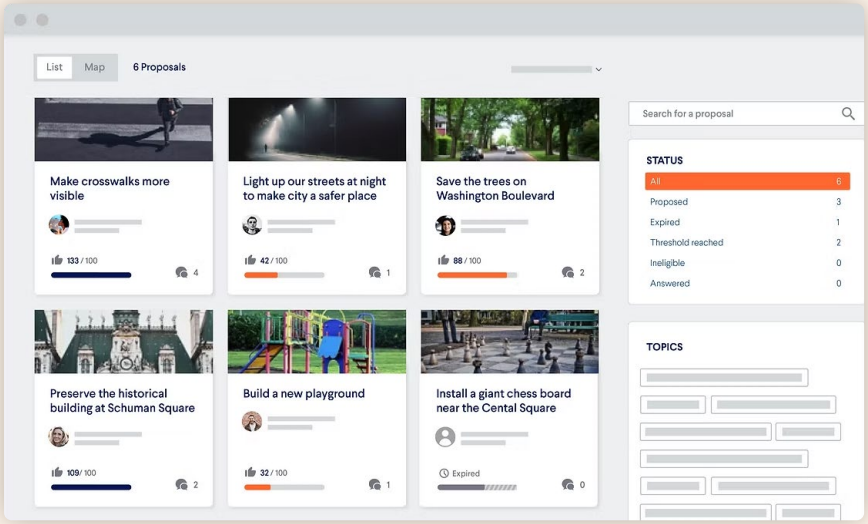
Form Sync (blended engagement)

Form Sync enables local governments to bring offline insights and input to scale with this feature, which enables easy scanning of paper forms (ideas and surveys) to bring the data directly into your engagement platform to make analysis, reporting, and decision-making of offline and online engagement more seamless.



Improved Citizen Proposals method (impact on decision-making)

Historically, proposals - often also referred to as petitions - have played a crucial role in facilitating bottom-up participation and allowing residents to influence the local government agenda. In collaboration with the City of Copenhagen, we have enhanced our Proposals method, leading to the development of co-sponsorship and better moderation capabilities. This equips local authorities with the necessary tools to understand gaps in their policy agenda while also managing expectations effectively.



Team gatherings

Our team is made up of 26 nationalities, and as a globally dispersed team, we work remotely. We've found it's important to connect in person throughout the year to maintain our transparent, connected team culture and also dig deeper on important topics that need workshopping. Here's a snapshot of how we got together in person in 2023:

Certifications

Each year we evaluate which external certifications we want to uphold our commitment to social impact and to maintain a world-class product. Here's a snapshot of three certifications we focused on:

B Corp Campaign in March 2023

Since becoming a Certified B Corporation in 2022, we engaged with the community by participating in B Corp Month via an impact campaign with our team and clients.

Cyber Essentials Certified in April 2023

We became certified to give clients peace of mind regarding how we protect ourselves against potential major cyber attacks.

Renewed ISO27001 Certification in August 2023

We renewed this certification to confirm that we take security practices seriously across our offices, employees, products, and services - including our community engagement platform.

Our team & Board of directors

Thank you to all of the team members who contributed to CitizenLab's mission in 2023!

Adrien Dessy
Alexander Rykhlitski
Alexandra Chandran
Alice Marquet
Aline Muylaert
Amanda Anderson
Amir Ali Bolouryazad
Andrea Conway
Anouk De Meulemeester
Benjamin Gordon
Brent Guffens
Charlotte Helene Schuringa
Charly Puttock
Chrysann Sutton
Claire Tobback
Colette Shields
Dan Keane
Danielle Naidu
Dina Boshra
Edwin Kato
Ellen Batens
Emile Heymans
Emily Alonzi
Emily Horton
Eva Mayer
Eva Rozsa
Francisco Pensa
Fraser Henderson
Hannah Adams
Hugo De Brouwer
Irene Pedruelo
Isabela Sacramento
Iva Kopraleva
James Speake
Jelena Gregorius
Jeroen Van Ransbeeck
Joost Vandenbroele
Jordan Houngbo
Koen De Hondt
Koen Gremmelprez
Lien Carton
Lora Botev
Lucas Van Der Zee
Malak Chabar
Mélissa Martinay
Natalie Ricklefs
Nola Moreau
Pablo Solana
Pauline van Heerdt
Rabiatu Wilson
Roberto Andrade Pérez
Rossanna Mercedes
Sarah Horton
Sébastien Hoorens
Sébastien Levoir
Simon Floré
Simon Tharby
Sören Fillet
Stijn Zwarts
Tomas Deron
Vanja Pantic
Wietse Van Ransbeeck
William Trakas
Yaesul Choi
Yan "James" Aung
Yuri Martens
Zelda Bas

And thank you to our Board of Directors for their continued guidance on Citizenlab's journey!

Wietse Van Ransbeeck (co-founder)
Aline Muylaert (co-founder)
Koen Gremmelprez (co-founder)
Jan Verbeke
Olivier de Duve
Nico Cras
Beth Noveck

Our partners

Latin America
Pablo Valenzuela, Marcela Ayarza, and Danitza Vymazal

Denmark
Søren Kielgast and Brian Bruhn

Poland
Artur Kacprzak

Serbia
Goran Segedinac

Sweden
Henrik Challis and Ylva Hamp

Türkiye
Levent Koç and Lider Kara

Norway
Ann-Heidi Paulsen Orvik

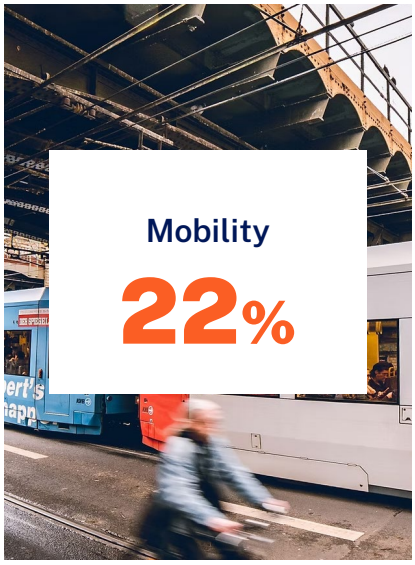
Adressing our mission

CitizenLab’s mission is to build stronger democracies by making public decision-making more inclusive, participatory, and responsive.

2023's most engaging projects

We reviewed the 100 most engaging projects of the year and noticed several trends in topics, engagement methods, and country preferences.

Most popular project topic(s)



Pilot projects that were open to public comment, like temporarily closing a street to get feedback on traffic patterns before proceeding, addressing waste management, dogs in public areas, or recycling led to high resident participation. This approach of focusing on specific issues, coupled with tackling more complex topics like Local Plans and Comprehensive Plans, which involved imagining a future more livable city, has been highly effective.

The reason is clear:

These are topics that residents have an intimate knowledge of, and therefore are local experts on. Their lived experiences provide tangible solutions to questions like, 'How can we make this street more biker-friendly?' or 'How could we make our downtown area more vibrant?' This not only benefits local governments in decision-making but also adds immense value to the broader community.

Case studies

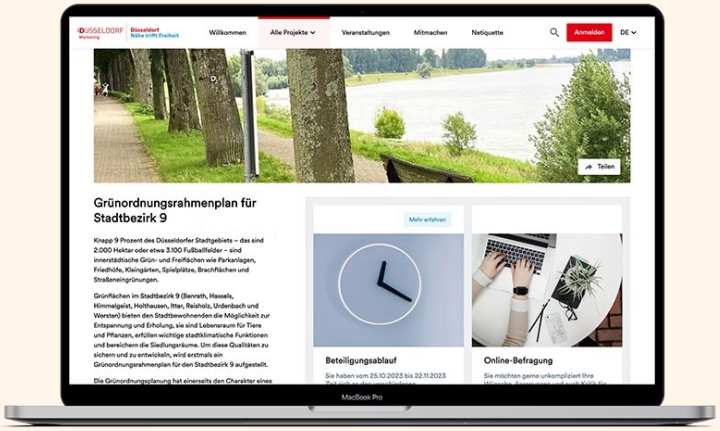
City of Düsseldorf plans more green spaces with the community (Germany)

“Always wanted to become a city planner?” With this intriguing question, Düsseldorf is sparking creativity and inviting residents to actively shape their local environment. The project to develop a green spaces framework plan for District 9, spearheaded by Düsseldorf’s Marketing department, is turning urban planning into an engaging and collaborative endeavor – with a little help from the CitizenLab platform.

Using the interactive Mapping tool, residents can pinpoint specific locations within neighbourhoods on a custom-layered map of the District and suggest areas for new green spaces, playgrounds, or communal open areas.

Besides adding ideas on a map, participants can also add general suggestions on an ideation forum, or share their opinions about what’s good and what can be further improved through a survey on the platform.

Residents were very eager to share insights, based on their lived experiences, and help come to impactful solutions: the engagement team collected over 800 survey responses and 100 concrete ideas submitted.



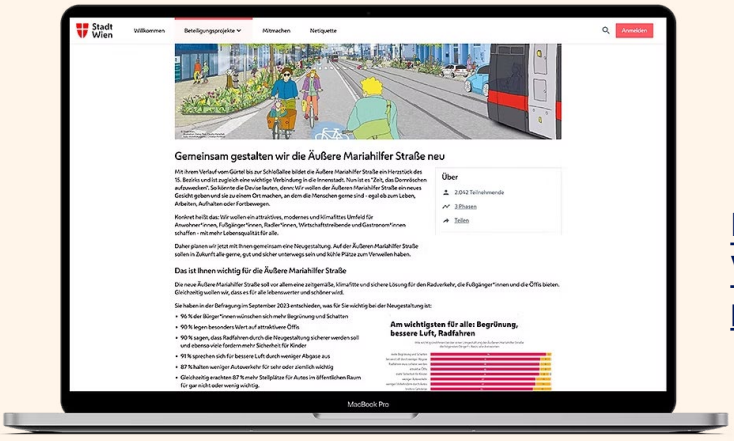
Explore Düsseldorf’s engagement platform

City of Vienna collects resident input for the redesign of an important axis to the city (Austria)

The Äußere Mariahilfer Straße is a key street in the 15th district and an important route to downtown Vienna. Recognizing the need for a comprehensive overhaul, the City of Vienna initiated a project to revitalise and transform it into a functional and appealing space for residents and visitors alike.

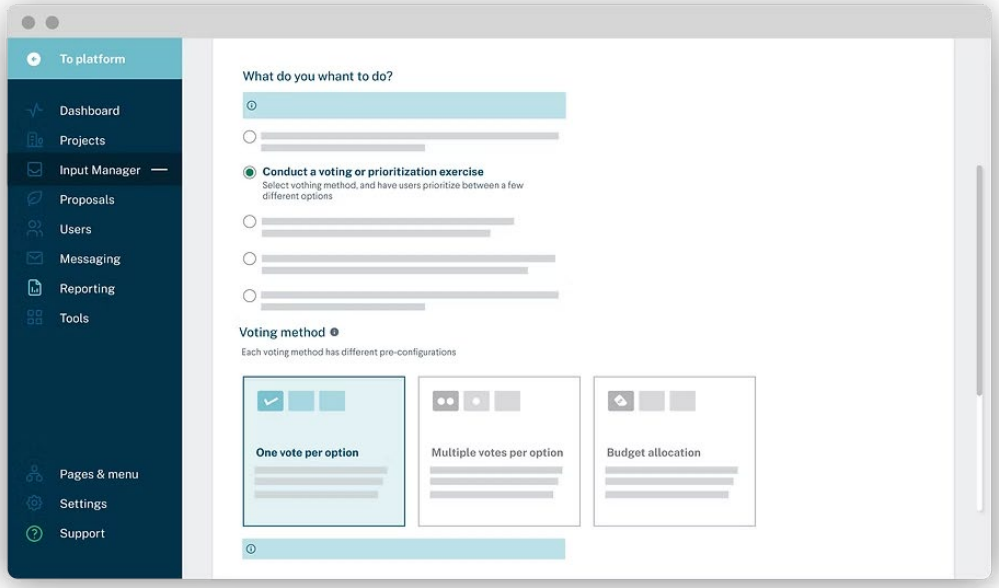
The objective is multifaceted: create a modern environment adapted to the needs of locals, pedestrians, cyclists, and businesses. This implies a collaborative approach to the redesign process, focusing on ensuring efficient, safe mobility and providing serene, inviting spots for relaxation and social interaction.

Using the CitizenLab platform's built-in survey tool, residents had the opportunity to contribute their thoughts on key improvements. A whopping 2,043 community members took the time to fill out the questionnaire, serving as a critical component in drafting preliminary designs and strategies.



[Explore the City of Vienna's engagement platform]

Most popular engagement method(s): **Voting**



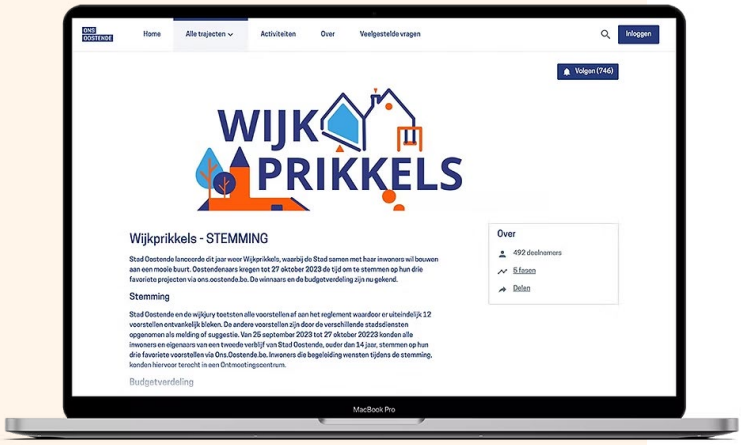
Until recently, Surveys and Ideation have been the go-to methods for obtaining in-depth insights. And with good reason: they are particularly effective in the early phases of decision-making, aiding in the comprehension of complex issues. surveys were the method that governments were most comfortable using and they generally garnered the highest participation rates.

However, we're championing a more integrated approach. That's why, in 2023, we released a suite of Voting methods to bridge the gap between insight and action. Our client community enthusiastically embraced these methods and we've seen that Voting projects have 146% greater participation than Surveys, up until now considered our most accessible engagement method for some residents - in other words, the method leading to the highest engagement.

While Surveys lay the groundwork for understanding, Voting is instrumental when decisive action is required. It offers a direct, transparent way for residents to influence decisions, ensuring their votes lead to tangible outcomes. Our goal is to guide local governments towards this balanced methodology, leveraging both Surveys and Ideation for problem exploration and Voting for impactful decision-making, thereby enhancing overall engagement.

Irene Pedruelo
Product Manager

Case studies



City of Ostend calls for resident votes in the third edition of their participatory budgeting project (Belgium)

The City of Ostend is no stranger to the power of community engagement, and this is further evidenced as in 2023, they rolled out the third edition of their participatory budgeting programme “Wijkprikkels” that encourages residents to submit ideas for improving their neighbourhoods. To realise the community-driven projects, the city made available 125,000 euros.

Since April 3rd, the residents of Ostend could put forward their proposals on the city’s CitizenLab platform. The call for ideas was met with 56 innovative proposals. After a thorough review by both the city and a neighbourhood jury, 14 proposals were deemed eligible under the programme’s guidelines.

In September 2023, the pivotal moment arrived: voting. Residents and second-home owners in Ostend who are 14 years or older could cast their votes for their top three projects through until the end of October. 11 projects will be receiving funding and be realised in the coming months.

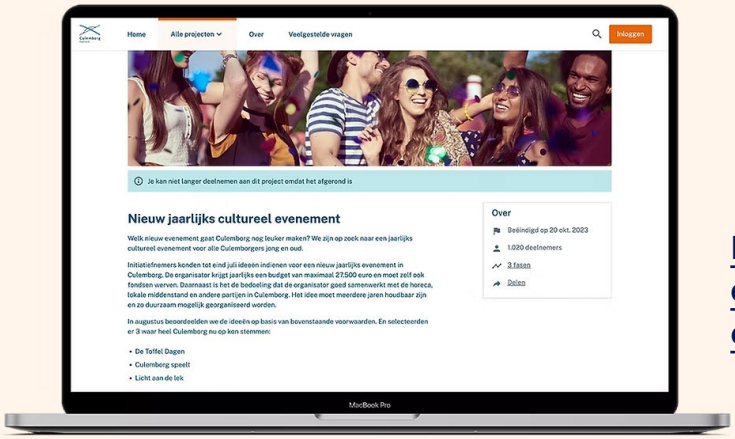
Explore the City of Ostend’s engagement platform

Municipality of Culemborg empowers residents to choose a new annual cultural event (Netherlands)

Culemborg introduced a new annual cultural event designed to delight residents of all ages. What’s truly groundbreaking is how they went about it: the town let its residents decide.

Until the end of July, creative minds were invited to submit their ideas for an event that would become a yearly highlight in Culemborg. In August, proposals were evaluated against previously established criteria, emphasizing sustainability and the potential for long-term continuation. Three standout ideas were selected for a public vote.

Leveraging CitizenLab's Approval Voting feature, one of the **different Voting Methods available in the toolbox**, the community buzzed with activity as residents cast their votes. The platform saw 1,020 people voting online, while an additional 121 residents participated in offline voting, demonstrating the inclusive nature of the initiative.



Explore the Municipality of Culemborg's engagement platform

So what do 2023's top projects have in common? We identified 3 key patterns in how local authorities designed and managed their engagement; these projects:

1

Asked residents' opinions on topics that they have intimate knowledge of by virtue of living in a particular city.

2

Truly gave residents a high degree of influence over decision-making or at least over project outcomes.

3

Closed the loop - acknowledged the importance of getting back to residents on not only the immediate outcomes of a consultation, and also the steps in between, implementation plans, and long-term implications.

back to menu

Trends in participation

In 2023, we worked with local governments in over 21 countries. Here are some of the country-specific trends we noticed:

The highest number of participation projects were launched in these 5 countries:

UK with **20 projects** per year per client

Chile with **13 projects** per year per client

Netherlands with **10 projects** per year per client

Denmark with **9.7 projects** per year per client

US with **9.3 projects** per year per client

A country's culture of engagement is an indicator of the most popular engagement method(s) for projects:

- **Denmark** saw the most open consultations with engagement methods across the breadth of our platform used (ranging across degree of influence from Voting to Proposals).
- While the **UK** launched the most projects per client, the majority of these consultations still used a single method -Surveys- to consult their communities.
- In the **Netherlands**, we saw a strong, communicative approach to open participation, with a higher-than-average use of informational engagement methods.

At CitizenLab, we define a culture of engagement as "a state where community engagement is deeply embedded in the local government's policies, way of working, and where there is a shared commitment to engaging with the community across all levels of the organisation."

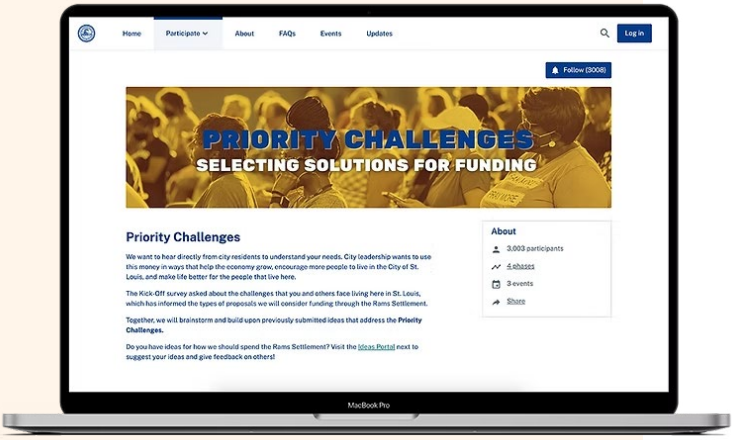
Wietse Van Ransbeeck
CEO and Co-founder of CitizenLab

So what does this all tell us?

It's noteworthy that we found no correlation between the number of projects launched and the amount of participation achieved. Instead, what seems to be a bigger factor in the most engaging projects are Culture of Engagement factors, such as using a robust variety of engagement methods, closing feedback loops, and reporting results. Additionally, the topic's relevance and the communication efforts undertaken by the local government also play crucial roles.

Let's turn the spotlight onto some more projects that caught our eye and take a closer look at their impact.

Case studies



City of St. Louis engages 3,700 residents in deciding on how to spend $250 million in Rams Settlement funds

We know from experience that some local governments hesitate to delve into open dialogues on sensitive topics, fearing backlash or overwhelming complexities. We also know for a fact that the City of St. Louis is certainly not one of them.

St. Louis took a bold step by launching its CitizenLab community engagement platform with a pressing yet delicate question: How should the Rams Settlement funds, a significant $250 million, be used? The city's leadership is committed to using it to make big, lasting changes that help the economy grow, encourage more people to live in the city, and make life better for the people who live there.

The project kicked off with an online survey collecting input to identify the priority challenges. Next, the community was asked to

share ideas matching these challenges. In 2024, a city-wide vote will determine the top ideas for implementation.

The community's response to the project was overwhelmingly positive: within the first two days, over 1,000 residents signed up to the platform, eager to make their voices heard. The enthusiasm remained strong, ultimately leading to 3,700 community members participating.

Discover ST. Louis's engagement platform

London Borough of Newham lets community members decide how to distribute £1.6 million across 8 neighbourhoods (United Kingdom)

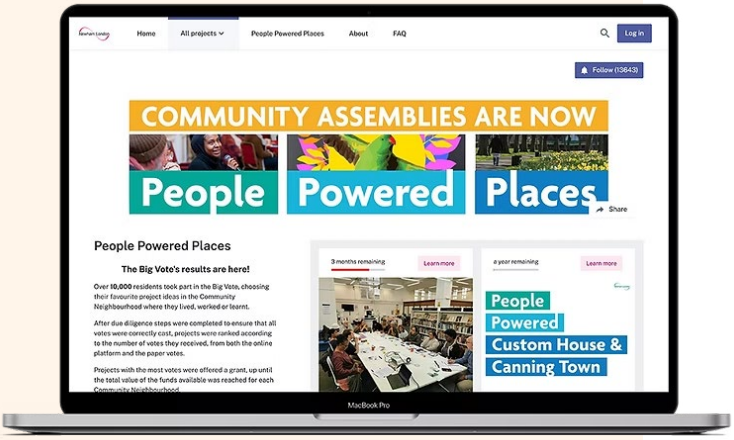
In 2023, the London Borough of Newham kicked off a new cycle of 'People Powered Places', its participatory budgeting programme. With a substantial funding pot of £1.6 million, this initiative is set to finance projects aimed at improving the borough's eight Community Neighbourhoods.

At the start of the project, residents of each neighbourhood gathered in community assemblies to identify local priorities and collaboratively develop project proposals. Following this, the submitted projects were put forward for a community-wide vote.

All residents 13 and older could vote for their 10 favourite projects using CitizenLab's Approval Voting method – or select 10 projects on their paper ballot. This blended engagement approach ensured that every resident, regardless of age or tech-savviness, had a say in the future of their neighbourhood.

Impressively, this led to over 10,000(!) residents casting their votes, resulting in the selection of 119 projects across the borough to receive grants.

Check out Newham's praised People Powered Places project.



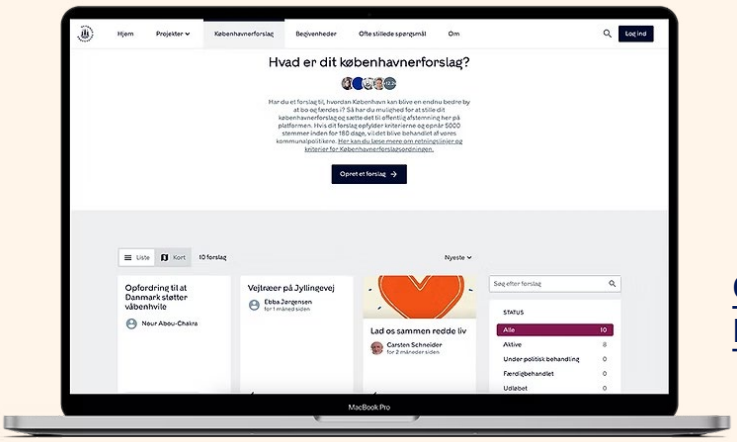
City of Copenhagen invites residents to co-shape the city's future through Proposals (Denmark)

In August 2023, the City of Copenhagen took a bold step forward on their participatory democracy journey with a new community engagement initiative: encouraging all residents over 15 years old to submit proposals for city improvement projects.

If a proposal receives 5,000 votes, it's not just noted — it's actively considered! Once a proposal reaches the threshold, it is reviewed by a committee before it is put up for a vote in the local city council.

Through this initiative, the city aims to reach up to 20,000 residents within the first year and a half. The engagement team very deliberately wanted to use a bottom-up approach to engage people differently in the hopes that this engagement method would inspire more direct democracy. As they see it, proposals can help engage more people, which in turn will bring a broader spectrum of ideas and perspectives to develop the future of Copenhagen.

The team's intentional approach around raising awareness for the project and good preparation seem to be working in their favour. It's only been about 4 months since they launched and already more than 12,000 people have registered on the platform.



Check out Copenhagen's Proposals hub

Gobierno Digital connects women in digital transformation digitally (Chile)

Under the banner of “Gobierno Digital”, the General Secretariat of the Presidency of Chile embarked on an ambitious journey. The goal is twofold: to weave the voices of community members and stakeholders into the digital transformation of the nation’s governmental bodies and institutions and to bring together brilliant minds across various services and institutions to share best practices.

The platform saw a significant surge in registrants after announcing and launching several initiatives, such as a network dedicated to women in digital transformation, a network for digital transformation coordinators at different levels of government, and consultations on, for example, data management strategy. Today, 8314 people are registered on the platform.

CitizenLab’s engagement features, such as online ideation and digital workshops, are instrumental in ensuring the platform’s success and championing a digital, inclusive, and equal Chile.

Discover Gobierno Digital’s engagement platform

City of Antony gives residents a direct voice in funding allocation for community projects (France)

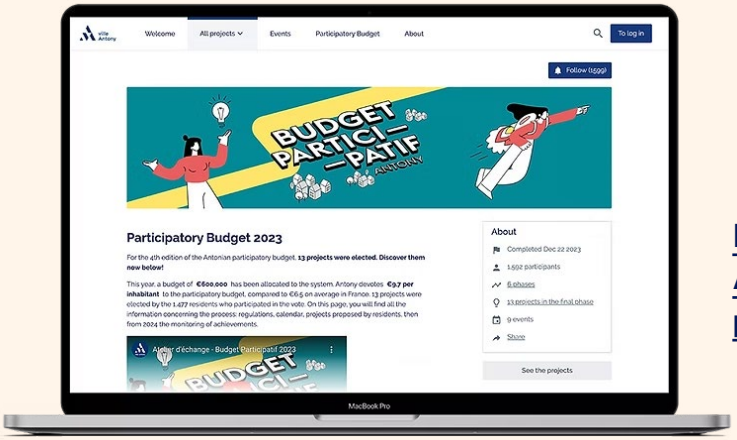
In 2023, the City of Antony launched the fourth edition of its participatory budgeting programme. Residents were empowered to propose projects and allocate a significant sum of €600,000 over the different proposals.

The project kicked off with an open invitation to all Antony residents to share and discuss ideas on the city’s CitizenLab platform. After the idea submission period, the engagement team

encouraged residents to continue exchanging and refining their suggestions for an additional month.

Next came the evaluation and preselection phase. The city's commitment to inclusive participation was underscored by involving three randomly selected residents in this process.

After the summer, Antony presented 35 eligible projects to the residents, inviting them back to the CitizenLab platform and vote for the projects they wanted to see realised. Each resident received seven votes, ensuring that a diverse range of projects could receive support. This process led to the selection of 13 projects, reflecting the collective vision of the Antony community.



Explore the City of Antony's engagement platform

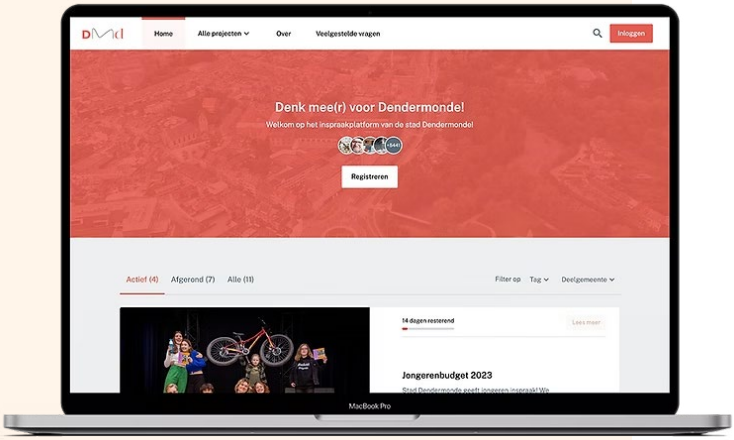
City of Dendermonde engages 12 to 18-year-olds through Youth Budget (Belgium)

Increasingly aware of the unique insights young people offer, more local governments are prioritizing youth engagement. Yet, getting youth to participate is a challenge for many local authorities.

The Belgian city of Dendermonde tackles this with its Youth Budget programme, specifically for 12 to 18-year-olds. Building on the success of its 2022 launch, the city continued the initiative in 2023, allocating €10,000 to youth-proposed projects.

The streamlined process involved several phases, from idea collection over voting for the top three projects to a budget allocation exercise by a jury, including youths, political representatives, and experts.

The project saw 325 young participants actively shaping their city's future.



Explore the City of Dendermonde's engagement platform

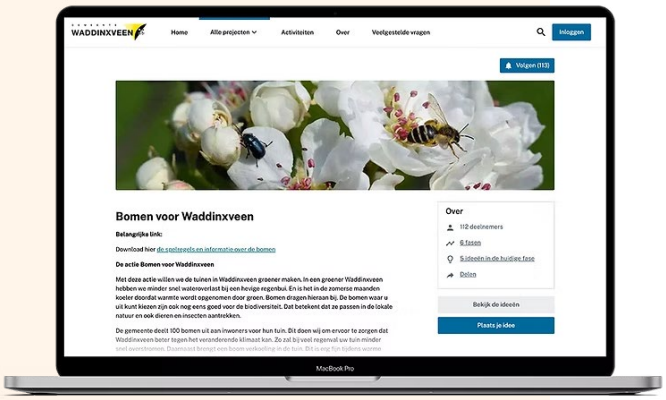
Decision-making with resident input

Our mission centres on inclusive, representative, and responsive decision-making. And while most of the governments we partner with also aim to make more representative decisions, starting the process can often feel heavy or intimidating.

For instance, tackling objectives like climate change impacts, which over half (55%) of European mayors in **Eurocities' Pulse Mayors Survey** identified as their biggest objective, might seem daunting. Yet, simple, engaging projects can effectively involve communities in these vital issues.

Take the following two climate action projects, for example:

Municipality of Waddinxveen empowers residents to take ownership in climate action with free trees (Netherlands)

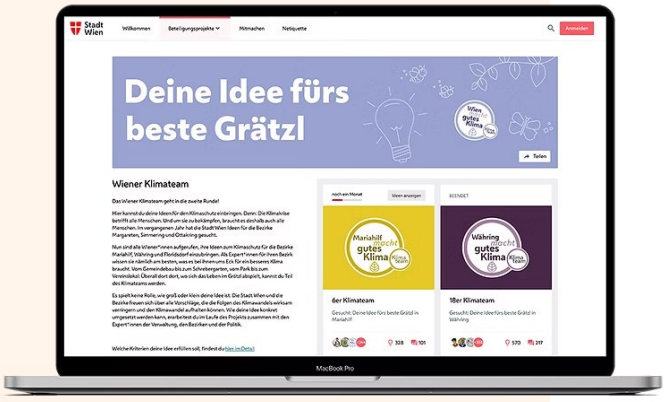


You may be ready to engage your community on a policy, but want to keep things light both for your own learning curve and to make participation accessible to more people across your community. In 2023, Waddinxveen, a town in the Netherlands, did this by inviting people to apply to win a tree for free. In October, they sent all the winners an email, and in November, they gave out the trees so that residents could plant them. In February 2024, they plan to get status updates from the residents who planted a tree by inviting them to share a photo and tips for how to take good care of the tree.

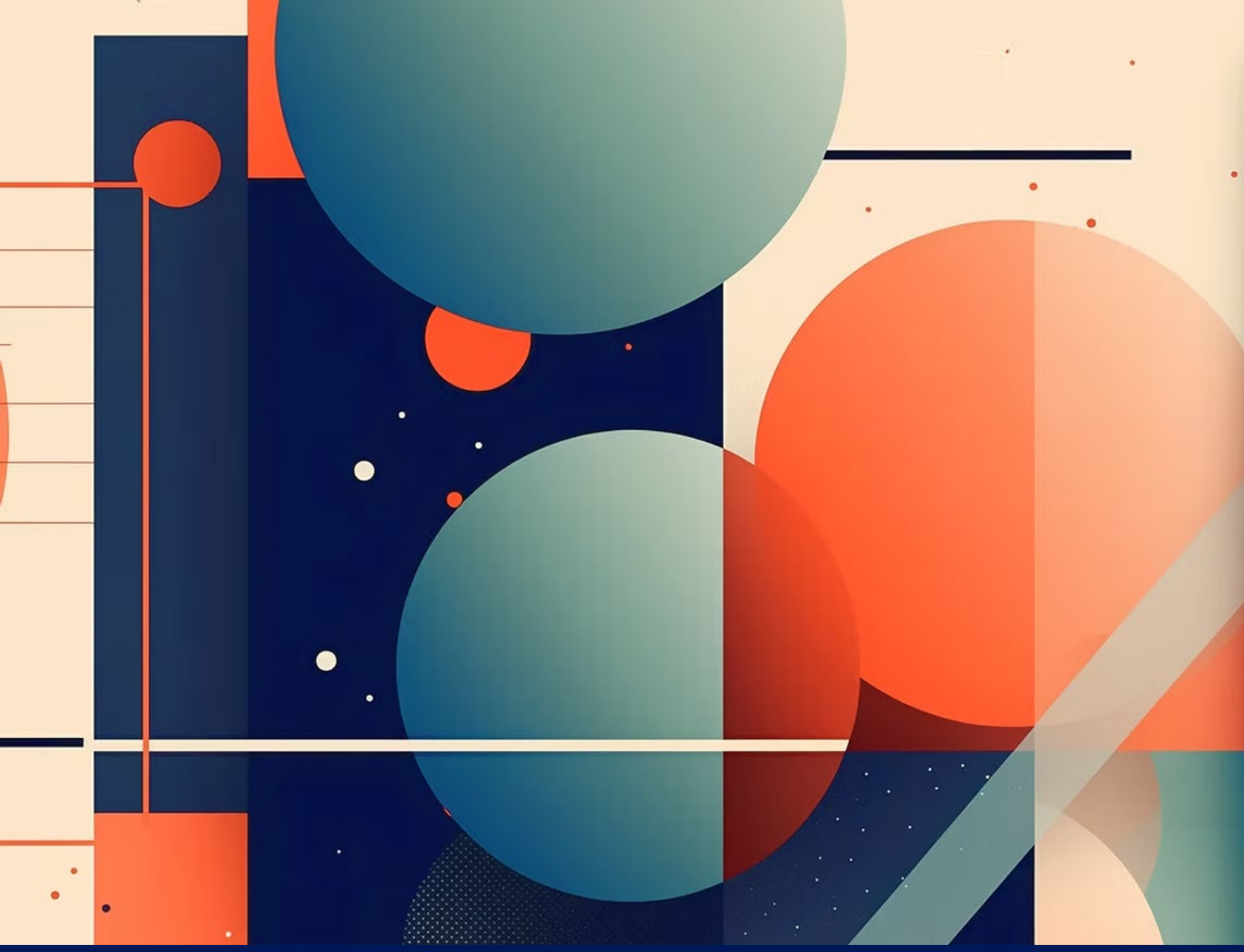
Explore the Municipality of Waddinxveen's engagement platform

City of Vienna successfully carries out the second pilot phase of its award-winning climate adaptation project (Austria)

Diving a little deeper, the City of Vienna started the second cycle of the Vienna Climate Team project in 2023. With this initiative, Vienna has been actively engaging residents in a collaborative and inclusive effort to shape a sustainable climate future together. Residents of 3 districts were invited to share their ideas and did so with great enthusiasm: the engagement team collected a whopping 1,365 climate action ideas. Following the idea submission phase, experts from the City of Vienna examined whether the proposed ideas were both effective and feasible. Afterward, those who submitted the ideas – in collaboration with experts – refined them into tangible climate projects with widespread benefits during project workshops. A representative community jury, selected by lot, chose 34 promising projects to be realised by December 2025.



Explore the City of Vienna's engagement platform



Looking to 2024

Are you curious about what we have in store for the year ahead? Here's a preview.

Unlocking participatory democracy's full potential

In 2023, we made significant strides in providing our clients with a powerful platform designed to foster a true culture of engagement - one that supports more continuous, inclusive, and representative engagement processes across a broader range of policy domains.

Looking ahead, 2024 will be about enabling, connecting, and inspiring local authorities across our network more than ever. We're aware that more than 2 billion people will engage in elections across 50 countries, including the United States and the European Union, where we primarily work. With report after report referencing eroded trust in government, we know that participatory democracy can play a big role in building it back and we want to help governments invest more in that beyond just their election cycles.

Some of what we have planned includes templatising use cases to **support the initial stages of project launches**, and helping local authorities benchmark themselves against fellow peers to measure success and progress.

Reflecting on 2023, we've also started thinking differently about what engagement success looks like and will be focused on creating a **delightful resident experience**. Our goal is to compile a showcase of 100 examples of engagement excellence, measuring beyond just engagement numbers and instead honing in on the quality of participatory processes (via elements like the quality of input, feedback loops, impact on decisions, and more). We plan to build this out with a nod to the changing realities of governments across our network - with reduced resources and tighter budgets, we understand the need to better communicate the impact of community engagement so that it's supported across organisations.

Public servants are fully equipped to do excellent engagement with our platform today, and in 2024 we want to tap more deeply into the **engagement motivations and barriers at the resident level** to unlock the full potential of participatory democracy. We'll be exploring this through co-design sessions with residents, accountability trackers - and more!

Help clients offer delightful participation experiences for residents and run high-quality projects

Assist clients in demonstrating the tangible impacts of engagement

Get a deeper understanding of what can push more residents to engage

As we make these shifts, we envision ourselves going from a Software as a Service (SaaS) to a Participation as a Service (PaaS) model - going beyond offering product features, and also paving the way for more impact and tangible outcomes.

One thing is clear: we're stepping into an exciting year full of potential and promise. Our team is more energised than ever, ready to give it our all and to make more meaningful impact.

To everyone who has contributed thus far

Thank you! Merci! Danke! Bedankt! Gracias!
Благодаря ти! Tak! Obrigado! Obrigada! متشكرم! Дзякуй! Hvala!
Grazie! Teşekkürler! شكرًا

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