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DIGITAL.GOV GUIDE

U.S. public participation playbook

A resource for government managers to effectively evaluate and build better services through public participation



Overview

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- [Understand the playing field](#)
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Overview

Reading time: 3 minutes

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- [How is the playbook structured?](#)
- [How was the playbook developed?](#)
- [How can I contribute to the U.S. Public Participation Playbook?](#)

What is the U.S. Public Participation Playbook?

The U.S. Public Participation Playbook is a resource for government managers to effectively evaluate and build better services through public participation using best practices and performance metrics.

Public participation — where citizens help shape and implement government programs — is a foundation of open, transparent, and engaging government services. From emergency management, town hall discussions and regulatory development to science and education, better engagement with those who use public services can measurably improve those services for everyone.

Developing a U.S. Public Participation Playbook is an [open government priority](#) included in both the first and second U.S. Open Government National Action Plans as part of the United States effort to increase public integrity in government programs. This resource reflects the commitment of the government and civic partners to measurably improve participation programs, and is designed using the same inclusive principles that it champions.

How is the playbook structured?

We needed to create a resource that combines best practices and suggested performance metrics for public servants to use to evaluate and build better services — to meet this need, based on discussions with federal managers and stakeholders, we identified five main categories that should be addressed in all programs, whether digital or offline. Within each category we identified 12 unifying plays to start with, each including a checklist to consider, resources and training. We then provide suggested performance metrics for each main category.

This is only the beginning, however, and we hope the plays will quickly expand and enrich. The U.S. Public Participation Playbook was not just designed for a more open government — it was designed collaboratively through a more open government.

How was the playbook developed?

The U.S. Public Participation Playbook was created in an unprecedented collaboration of seventy federal managers from more than three dozen federal programs with more than a dozen citizen engagement experts from organizations including the OpenGov Foundation, the National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation, World Bank, Deliberative Democracy Consortium and the Sunlight Foundation. It was created in [an open, transparent process](#) that included three public comment periods.

While the playbook was developed for federal managers to use initially, we see immediate benefit in expanding and enriching the content with the perspectives and experiences of all levels of public service, both offline and digital — we invite you to help achieve this.

How can I contribute to the U.S. Public Participation Playbook?

The Federal Public Participation Working Group, led by [the Federal SocialGov Community](#), is open to all discussion and contribution to the playbook. Once a month we will review all contributions, make updates, and report our progress.

Contributions to the U.S. Public Participation Playbook could include:

- New plays
- More recommendations
- More resources
- More training
- More performance metrics
- Improvement of existing recommendations, resources, training and performance metrics
- Expansion of the playbook to empower different communities

To contribute, please [email us](#) your recommendations or new content, or [visit the Madison platform](#), hosted by the OpenGov Foundation, to annotate the playbook.

[Now on GitHub: code and design contributions are welcomed and valued.](#)

Thank you.

[Establish goals](#) →

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Establish goals

Learn how to clearly define and communicate your objectives.

Reading time: 2 minutes

Play 1: Clearly define and communicate your objectives

Federal agencies understand the importance of meaningful public engagement. The type of engagement will differ for each organization, depending on resources, audience and mission. Every agency must set goals that align with its unique definition of success and empowers the public to engage with agencies in order to influence government priorities.

Checklist

- Identify what goal(s) you aim to achieve.
- Develop a plan that includes a timeline, and strategy –ramp up and drawdown.
- Evaluate organizational capacity for engaging and managing public participation.
- Identify internal and external stakeholders and partners.
- Evaluate and change strategy based on feedback and performance data.

Case studies

- [ePolicyWorks](#) is an initiative by the Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy. The tool is designed around a clear policy-making objective and addresses specific challenges in collaborative policy making.
- Agencies can use the [Regulations.gov](#) portal during the commenting period to consider public input and make relevant, appropriate revisions. [Regulations.gov](#) is a portal that simplifies finding, reviewing, and submitting comments on Rules and Proposed Rules that appear in the Federal Register.

Resources

- The [Environmental Protection Agency Public Participation Guide](#) contains numerous resources, including an excellent discussion of [situation assessments](#).
- [Synthesis 89](#), by Scott Giering, discusses The Transit Cooperative Research Program’s efforts to coordinate effective public participation strategies for transit, e.g. goal-setting, information exchange, and identifying “the public.”
- The Department of Transportation’s Federal Highway Administration provides a [Transportation Professional Capacity Building site](#) with many resources and [case studies](#).

Metrics: How do you know you successfully established goals?

Metrics will vary according to the platform you use. Some broad examples include:

- Surveys – responses should drive learning and improvement.
- Web – Google Analytics or heat-mapping shows participant engagement.
- Email – click rates, bounce rates, unsubscribes, participation in a call-to-action.
- Social Media – participant engagement analytics, reach, changing behavior, hashtag use.
- Apps (native and mobile) – use statistics, are “transactions” being completed, is there input or feedback from the field (i.e. uploading multiple photos in citizen science app), are people actively using a native app (i.e. logging in multiple times).
- Online Video Chats (i.e. hangouts) – participation rate, views.
- Discussion Threads (i.e. chat rooms) – number of participants, input from the public, up votes/down votes.
- Blog – viewership, comments, action audience takes next.
- Transactional – hard numbers related to online transaction completion.
- Rates of completion for public participation opportunities (e.g. Comment form submissions to federal agencies)
- Rates of API participation and usage, e.g. number of API implementations, queries received via API, successful submissions received via API.

[← Overview](#)

[Understand the playing field →](#)

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Understand the playing field

Learn how to understand and empower your participants.

Reading time: 5 minutes

On this page

- [Play 2: Understand your participants and stakeholder groups](#)
- [Play 3: Understand and communicate the benefit of participation](#)
- [Play 4: Empower participants through public/private partnership](#)

Play 2: Understand your participants and stakeholder groups

Community and stakeholder understanding is key to organizing a successful participatory effort. Once you determine who you're trying to reach, you can refine your outreach efforts to effectively communicate with participants and stakeholders.

Checklist

- Create personas of your target participants in order to understand their needs.
- Conduct sampling and initial outreach to better define and understand participants.
- Use groupwork methods to draw representations based on observation and not assumption.
- Identify obstacles you must overcome to reach participants, including connectivity and schedules.
- Determine how you will reach diverse groups of people with broad perspectives.
- Identify gatekeepers, including community groups, who can help reach potential participants.
- Customize your engagement strategies for each type of stakeholder.
- Meet your audience where they are, not where you want them to be.

Case studies

- [Peace Corps Application Process Redesign](#): Peace Corps redesigned their application process to meet the expectations of their target audiences. A shortened application allowed applicants to choose which countries they want to serve in. This receptivity to the audience's needs and experiences resulted in record-breaking application numbers for Peace Corps.
- The National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency opened unclassified geospatial intelligence information to the general public through their [Ebola Relief Website](#). They recognized an unprecedented need for a large number of stakeholders to quickly access information that can help NGO's and other workers battle the virus.

Resources

The [CDC: Gateway to Health Communications & Social Marketing Practice](#) website provides resources to build health communication or social marketing programs. It provides tips for analyzing and segmenting an audience, choosing appropriate channels and tools, and evaluating the success of messages or campaigns.

Play 3: Understand and communicate the benefit of participation

Participants must understand how they can contribute to a program and why it is important they participate. Clearly defined and communicated benefits help craft effective messages and inclusive engagement. Understanding what successful participation looks like is critical to knowing whether your program succeeds.

Checklist

- Decide what essential information participants need to know before engagement.
- Build a communications strategy that considers the expectations and motivations of participants and the value of participation.
- Involve senior leadership and ensure they understand the importance of participation.
- Provide inclusive access to orientation materials.
- Define how participants benefit from the process and what they can contribute, including information, permission, and time.
- Inform participants when they should expect to hear follow-up from their engagement.
- Report how participation impacted program efforts.

Case studies

- [National Day of Civic Hacking](#) organizes submit problem statements to explain an issue, explain how the public can address it, and provide resources to help orient people to the problem. They also outline time commitments and skills needed.
- [Regulation Room](#) is a pilot project sponsored by the Federal Government and operated by the Cornell e-Rulemaking Initiative. Organizers provide participants resources to better understand the rulemaking process and teach them how to make an effective comment. Participants comment on a report after discussion ends to ensure the program captures ideas before the Government receives a final version.
- [Give a Minute](#) is a micro-participation/crowdsourcing event with clear expectations for participants. Moderators collect and share ideas both digitally and in-person.
- [NASA Socials](#) are events where NASA's social media followers can learn about NASA's missions, people, and programs. Through these behind-the-scenes experiences, participants are empowered to advocate for the agency and attend future events.

Play 4: Empower participants through public/private partnership

Leveraging corporate and community partners is a powerful way of gaining support and participation for government campaigns and events. Partners and sponsors can help reach new audiences or reinforce messages within existing ones. Public/private partnerships also legitimize both what your agency is trying to accomplish and how that information or program is delivered.

Checklist

- Define and create partnerships.
- Survey agency employees for knowledge of community and stakeholder groups.
- Reach out to nonprofit organizations and community partners who can amplify participation opportunities and connect your agency with additional partners.
- Use a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), an Interagency Agency Agreement (IAA), or another type of contractual agreement to describe each partner's responsibilities.
- Outline the terms and the specifications of the partnership, including messaging, logo usage, promotional opportunities and boundaries.
- Create an "authorized partners" list to reduce legal issues

Case studies

- [The Heart Truth](#) campaign, created by the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI), partners with dozens of corporate and community sponsors. The campaign raises awareness about heart disease and its effect on women through both online and in-person fitness events.
- In 2014 [LabTV](#) launched its vision of creating a free, scientist-to-student web/video platform aimed at inspiring the next generation of researchers. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) worked with LabTV to produce hundreds of videos of NIH researchers with varying backgrounds and interests, and matched students with scientists who can share information about life as a medical researcher.
- A coalition of private companies, non-profit organizations, and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) created [STOPTHINKCONNECT](#). Partnering with industry leaders, DHS attracts a broader audience and garners significant public participation for online events such as Twitter chats to help spread its message.
- The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) [Distraction.gov](#) website is dedicated to stamping out distracted driving. DOT enlisted the help of several organizations to spread its message. One partner, the FOX television show "Glee", helped produce public service announcements that feature characters from the show.

Metrics: How do you know you understand the playing field?

Measure:

- Total number of participants.
- Number of participants needed to establish a representative sample size, as well as primary and secondary groups.
- Number of participants from primary and secondary target groups.
- Number of new participants.
- Number of returning participants.
- Percentage of participants satisfied with the "customer experience."
- Rates of conversion, e.g. from contacts > visitors > signups > contributions.
- Volume of sharing, recruitment activity or other promotion.
- Quantify the quality and effectiveness of participation, e.g. relevance of feedback.
- Quantify the value and in-kind services donated by public/private partnerships, e.g. air-time, printing, advertising, or prizes.
- Numerical comparison of current participation with previous efforts and non-partnership activities.

[← Establish goals](#)

[Design participation →](#)

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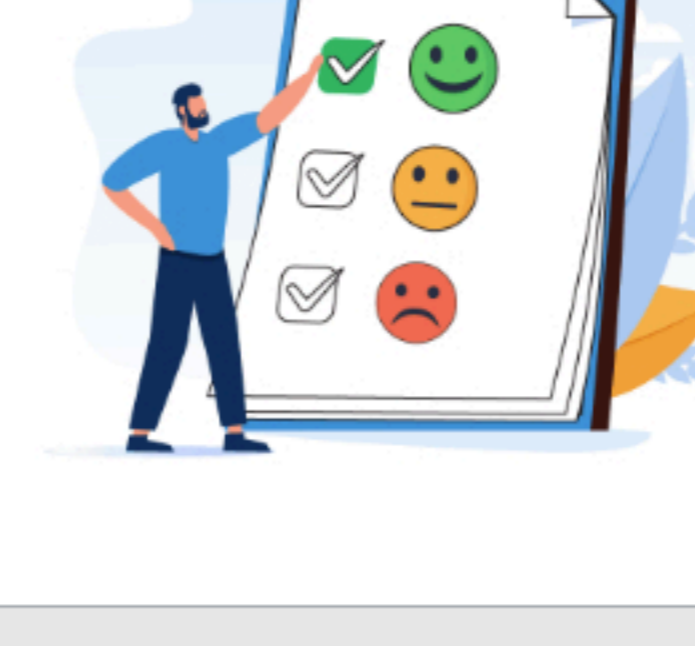
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Design participation

Learn how to design for inclusiveness and participation.

Reading time: 11 minutes

- On this page
Play 5: Select appropriate design format for public participation
Play 6: Design for inclusiveness
Play 7: Provide multi-tiered paths to participation
Play 8: Provide effective and timely notifications
Play 9: Encourage community building through responsive outreach
Play 10: Protect citizen privacy

Play 5: Select appropriate design format for public participation

Enable broad participation by offering responsive, accessible, intuitive, mobile-ready tools that can be rendered in multiple formats on a wide range of platforms.

Checklist

- Identify critical and secondary requirements for program success.
Determine paths for participation and their requirements, such as accessibility, commenting and annotation.
Design for flexibility using current coding techniques such as HTML5 and CSS.
Incorporate accessible graphics, color and visual techniques to improve engagement.
Use analytics and feedback to diversify delivery methods, such as mobile.
Adopt mobile-friendly capabilities such as responsive web design and link to mobile friendly pages.
Communicate through channels like SMS, Interactive Voice Responses and Unstructured Supplementary Service Data for participants without wireless connectivity or access to the Internet.
Continuously improve operations during the life of the project, and to focus on quality, efficiency and effectiveness of processes.

Case Studies

- The White House Engage website allows citizens to submit questions and comments, join online events, and engage with government via social media.
USDA.gov underwent a major redesign to improve participant experience and usability. They used analytics and lessons learned from prior redesigns to determine popular content and participant preferences. This blog entry provides an overview of their redesign process.
The NOAA Release Make Mobile App allows fishermen to report their releases of Shortfin Mako sharks while in the water. The app uses a device's built-in GPS to fill in exact location coordinates.

Resources

- The Victoria (Australia) Toolkit for Public Participation maintains a great selection of different PP formats.
The Center for Land Use Education's PDF guide, Crafting an Effective Plan for Public Participation, provides a framework for tailoring a plan that fits local needs and capacities.

Play 6: Design for inclusiveness

Whenever you're running any sort of public engagement effort, make sure the design and setup are inclusive. Consider persons with disabilities who use screen readers, people with limited English proficiency or lower literacy skills, and many others who may experience difficulty reading.

Checklist

- Provide accessibility options for persons with disabilities, the aging population and others.
Evaluate the need for multilingual support, including Spanish language services.
Use Plain Language communication throughout the life cycle of the program.
Consider both online and offline support, including a physical version and digital package.
Analyze if participants can engage without a facilitator.
Analyze if participants can contribute with 'group input' rather than individual sign-up, and if they can submit input from face-to-face workshops and other sources.
Provide cultural competency support that values diversity reflected in the participant personas.
Talk to underrepresented members of communities.
Recognize common dynamics when cultures interact and develop adaptations to service delivery.
Design for multiple learning styles.
Recruit volunteers for visual note taking, or graphic facilitation.
Provide contact information for official support and accessibility teams.
Test your content for accessibility at all stages of development.

Case Studies

- Food and Drug Administration: Using Medicines Wisely: Increasing Access to Information for Women with Intellectual Disabilities
The Digital Communications Division (DCD) in HHS champions a 508 Program that leads the development and review of HHS Web content, social media, and supporting technologies. They also assembled a 508 Accessibility Lab with a collection of assistive and evaluative technologies.
Disability.Gov is the U.S. federal government website for information on disability programs and services nationwide and is a model for accessibility on the web.

Resources

- Guide to Section 508 Standards. The U.S. Access Board's Section 508 Standards apply to electronic and information technology procured by the federal government, including computer hardware and software, websites, phone systems, and copiers.
Usability.gov contains resources for agencies to evaluate their websites for both usability and accessibility.
The Improving the Accessibility of Social Media in Government toolkit curates and share best practices to help agencies ensure their social media content is accessible everyone, including h disabilities.
The U.S. Department of Homeland Security developed 508 Compliance Test Processes that provide instructions for testing the compliance of applications, Word documents, and PDF documents.

Play 7: Provide multi-tiered paths to participation

Good government is responsive and engaging. To ensure broad participation and involve more citizens in the decision-making process use a variety of channels to communicate and provide opportunities for different levels of engagement.

Checklist

- Determine the level of participation your program needs to succeed.
Empower stakeholders as decision makers and share information.
Determine if you hold the resources to sustain a multi-tiered, two-way engagement strategy.
Define what input you are looking for and what channels people are most likely to use.
Notify employees of opportunities for participation and teach them how to respond if approached.

Case Studies

- The citizen Advisory Chemical Weapons Alternatives Program established two Citizen Advisory Boards that make project recommendations.
The U.S. Trade Representative's traveling roadshow that gathers feedback on trade agreement negotiations from stakeholders: industry, small business, academia, labor unions, environmental groups, and consumer advocacy organizations.
The U.S. Food and Drug Administration solicits multiple levels of participation through its Patient Network site. Participants can comment on proposed regulations and guidance, attend or speak at public meetings, and join an advisory committee to influence decisions like product approvals.

Resources

- The International Association for Public Participation publishes an IAP2 standards document that describes the various levels of public participation and examples of techniques.

Play 8: Provide effective and timely notifications

Throughout the life of an engagement effort, effective communication with participants and stakeholders is key. This play offers tips and advice for letting your audience know about opportunities to participate, and how to keep them engaged and active for the duration of the event.

Checklist

- Develop a comprehensive outreach plan that includes timelines to reach different potential participants.
Use a variety of channels such as the Federal Register, SMS, postal, email, flyers and social media.
Provide a toolkit of materials, including an outline of timelines.
Deliver consistent updates and repeat them across multiple platforms.

Case Studies

- The Union of Concerned Scientists released a scorecard on how agencies allow employees to communicate with the public.
Federal Student Aid's AskFARSA campaign sets up monthly office hours for stakeholders to ask questions about student aid via Twitter.
Storify recaps each session is posted the next day on Storify.

Resources

- DigitalGov Search seeks to provide immediate answers to the public's search questions. In addition to Federal Register documents, it also incorporates results from other specialized government websites and social media accounts.

Play 9: Encourage community building through responsive outreach

Community development and outreach involves communication among community stakeholders, partner organizations, research centers, and government agencies. Goals include communicating reliable information about federal programs and policies, including addressing complaints; obtaining public feedback about the impact of government activities; fostering conversations and incorporating feedback into the policymaking process; and strengthening the channels of communication between communities, the government, and public/private sectors.

Checklist

- Determine shared decision-making responsibilities for success, problem solving, and accountability.
Develop a dialogue process that:
Clearly defines guidelines.
Prepares for variations in commitment to participation.
Includes time to pause, evaluate input and evolve.
Catalyzes the discussion if engagement stalls.
Moderate and facilitate conversations to encourage connections and discussion of ideas.
Create regular reports to summarize contributions so people can see what others are saying.
Publish your programs' points of contact for communities to access.
Celebrate effectiveness and address critical feedback with participants.
Continue the conversation and maintain relationships through regular and ongoing engagements such as regularly scheduled check-in meetings with stakeholders.
Use the framework you created to develop future uses for the network.

Case Studies

- HHS Office on Women's Health encouraged community organizations around the country to organize events in celebration of National Women's Health Week 2014.
FDA's Office of Women's Health launched the Pink Ribbon Sunday Mammography Awareness Program to educate African-American and Hispanic women about early detection of breast cancer through mammography.
U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Exchange Program fosters community engagement through the arts.
NASA's International Space Challenge is an international collaboration focused on space exploration that takes place over 48 hours in cities around the world.
Valley Forge National Historical Park transformed itself through civic input, as reported in "From Isolation to Integration"

Resources

- The National Park Service published two public participation guides, Beyond Outreach: A guide to engaging diverse communities, and Tribal and Public Consultation for Historic Preservation Toolkit
Two Masters students at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government looked at social media and its role in civic participation in both the U.S. and United Kingdom and published a report, Using Social Media to Enhance Civic Engagement in Federal Agencies.

Play 10: Protect citizen privacy

Public participation is crucial to our democracy, but federal agencies must engage in ways that protect privacy, while maintaining compliance with federal laws such as the Federal Records Act (FRA) and the Privacy Act.

Checklist

- Identify what information your agency stores or maintains, and for how long.
Publish privacy policies for all engagement channels so the public can see what information you collect, if any, and how your agency may use it.
Publish terms of use detailing record-keeping practices and reasons why you may remove comments including profanity, sharing personal information and other rules that protect privacy.
Consult with your agency's Records Officer to determine how to manage digital interactions and public comments as federal records.
Discuss your privacy policies, terms of service, and other charter documents with your agency's Privacy Officer and/or legal experts.
Establishing procedures for handling personally identifiable information (PII).
Provide a medium for people to provide input anonymously.
Use indirect means, like hashtags, to join conversations online instead of targeting individual users.

Case Studies

- The FEMA Privacy & Comment Policy comprehensively addresses how social media, web, mobile, and SMS data is used, stored, and managed.
The Peace Corps Privacy Act Notice is a plain language example of a comprehensive, brief, and easy-to-understand privacy policy for the web.

Resources

- CIO Council's Privacy Best Practices for Social Media: This comprehensive guide provides resources and best practices for creating social media policies that are in compliance with the Privacy and Records Keeping Act.
White House Expands Data Protection: There is no formal guidance on how agencies can use big data. However, this report and recommendation from the White House provides insight on how and when agencies may be able to use big data from the Internet of things, the web, mobile, and more, and whether agencies will be required to extend universal Privacy Act Protections.

METRICS: HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU SUCCESSFULLY DESIGN PARTICIPATION?

- Generate solid baseline data on how much your audience knows, and how well they responded to your message.
Analyze whether the program becomes integrated with participants or owned by the community.
Measure:
Readership/visits/participation in channels, i.e. programs, sites and blogs.
Awareness about the federal agency's goals, mission, purpose, or resources.
Public participation (survey responses, event attendance, other contributions, i.e. time and ideas).
Volume of community organizations participating compared to previous programs.
Size of community that your partners reach.
The role of public engagement in the planning/decision-making process.
Variation in percentage between current overall participation and previous efforts.
Online engagement trends (e.g. comments and shares) over the entire length of the event.
Engagement across each channel, independently, to determine the level of participation on each.
For privacy protection, measure:
Percentage of your programs, websites and social media sites contain provisions for protecting PII and maintaining Privacy Act compliance.
Frequency that community managers monitor comments for PII.
Volume of comments community managers delete for PII on a monthly or bi-monthly basis.
Frequency of agency record audits to ensure it is not maintaining broader records than necessary.
For accessibility, start with guidelines in:
W3C Web Accessibility Metrics, a detailed report on useful metrics to assess the accessibility level of websites, including the accessibility level of individual websites, or even large-scale surveys of the accessibility of many websites.
Section 508 Checklist, including Pass/Fail criteria for each of the Section 508 standards (e.g. a text equivalent for every non-text element, functional electronic forms).
US Access Board guidelines and standards to help meet accessibility and inclusion standards, including Communications and IT.

Navigation buttons: Understand the playing field, Facilitate participation

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Facilitate participation

Learn how to use data to inform decisions about public participation.

Reading time: 3 minutes

Play 11: Use Data to Drive Decision Making

Use data to inform decisions about engagement efforts and public participation. Data can help you decide the best format for your engagement effort, the best tools to use, the most receptive audiences and more. Data will help you get the desired results and adapt your engagement effort along the way.

Checklist

- Define your goals and establish key performance indicators.
- Continuously reconsider metrics to make sure they are still the best ones to use.
- Educate employees about open data policies and publicly available datasets.
- Ask data-literate employees to attend and participate in public engagements.
- Include a public feedback track into all decision-making processes—anything from project management to policy decisions—as early and often as possible.
- Assign a member of the team to routinely keep track of public feedback systems, such as, but not limited to: Web Analytics, Emails, FOIA requests, popular datasets on Data.gov and beyond.
- Prioritize next steps based on public feedback in an iterative process and solicit fresh feedback at each incremental step.
- Solicit feedback across platforms, mediums, and from all of the public.

Case studies

- [Govcode](#) is a website that features government open source projects. Open source projects that utilize the 'help wanted' tag proactively solicit contributions from the public on government technology projects.
- [Public Participation in Government Web Design](#): The Data.gov team integrated feedback from virtual, online, face to face testing, and social media platforms to dramatically change the site design in response to customer needs.
- [Web Design Changes? Let the Metrics be Your Guide](#) NASA metrics showed that mobile use of NASA.gov initially outpaced desktop use, confirming their decision to change to a mobile-first design.
- [Government CX: Finding the Metrics That Matter](#) The Export-Import Bank measures transaction processing times and ease of use to create the best experience for their stakeholders.
- [Analyzing Who's Using your Agency's Data with FOIA requests](#) GSA's Open Data Point of Contact reached out to the agency FOIA office to survey FOIA requesters on how they used requested information to get a better sense of the data demands of the public.

Resources

- [Data.gov](#) is a rich resource for civic hackers, tech entrepreneurs, data scientists, and developers of all stripes. It includes information about APIs, open source projects, and relevant developer resources across government.
- [Enigma](#) is amassing the largest collection of public data produced by governments, universities, companies, and organizations. Concentrating all of this data provides new insights into economies, companies, places and individuals.
- [API Release Kit](#) describes the elements agencies should include in federal API releases.

Metrics: How do you know you're successfully facilitating participation?

- Measure the % of decision-making processes – anything from project management to policy decisions—that have a public feedback track.
- Measure how often "next steps" in a decision-making process are informed and prioritized in accordance with public feedback.
- Measure how effective public feedback platforms and mediums are at reaching an equitable representation of the public.
- Measure how the timing of public feedback solicitation affects the outcomes of decision-making processes.
- Determine the value and effectiveness of the use of public feedback data, such as, but not limited to: Web Analytics, Emails, FOIA requests, popular datasets on Data.gov, as public sentiment indicators.

[← Design participation](#)

[Evaluate and report →](#)

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DIGITAL.GOV GUIDE

U.S. public participation playbook

A resource for government managers to effectively evaluate and build better services through public participation



Evaluate and report

Learn the importance of being transparent when reporting public participation.

Reading time: 2 minutes

Play 12: Transparently report outcomes and performance of participation

Transparency builds and maintains trust and respect with participants. When government takes an active role in allowing public participation in the decision-making process, accountability is key to maintaining trust of participants, by transparently reporting outcomes and performance of participation on a regular basis. Transparency allows for equal assessment with internal agencies, stakeholders and the public.

Checklist

- Establish and communicate where, when and how you will report outcomes and performance.
- Decide what type of open and accessible formats will be most useful for your audience.
- Report outcomes on time while participants are still engaged.
- Explain the importance of transparently reporting outcomes and performance of participation.
- Encourage others to share findings and outcomes from your program.
- Encourage continued community dialogue and awareness of lessons learned and outcomes.
- Recognize the contributions of partners and stakeholders in developing and maintaining your agency's playbook.

Case studies

- The [National Archives and Records Administration](#) (NARA) used public feedback to develop the agency's third Open Government Plan. It also reported outcomes of NARA's previous Open Government Plans.
- [NASA](#) – Disk Detective is a crowdsourcing project whose primary goal is to produce publishable scientific results. It uses citizen science to help astronomers discover embryonic planetary systems, reporting outcomes on time while participants are still engaged.
- [Ford's Theatre: Remembering Lincoln on HistoryPin](#) – The HistoryPin platform encourages participants to contribute content, share findings and continue community dialogue. Ford's Theatre is working with a range of partner institutions to collect, digitize and share local responses from the 13 months after former U.S. President Abraham Lincoln's assassination.

Resources

- [Managers Guide to Evaluating Civic Participation](#), by Dr. Tina Nabatchi, discusses the power of process and impact evaluations to assessing citizen participation.
- [Effective Engagement: building relationships with community and other stakeholders: The Engagement Planning Workbook](#), by the Victorian (Australia) Department of Sustainability and Environment, provides tools for evaluating engagement.
- [Democracy On-Line: An Evaluation of the National Dialogue on Public Involvement in EPA Decisions](#), by Thomas C. Beierle, offers insight into a two-week on-line discussion of public participation at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Metrics: How do you know you're successfully evaluating and reporting outcomes?

- Highlight performance of participation through use of data visualizations and infographics, illustrating transparent outcome.
- Quantify outcomes of performance of participation through Town Hall meetings and/or presentations
- Conduct web research and run social media analytics to analyze ways to report outcomes of participation.
- Post articles directing users to results of past and current initiatives that encourage and require public participation, and reflect outcomes.

[← Facilitate participation](#)

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