RULES OF
ENGAGEMENT

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

FOR CIVIC DIALOGUE

IN A POST-TRUTH ERA

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ABOUT DESIGNFIX 2017

DesignFix is a collaborative social design programme run by Frontend.com. It brings student and professional designers together to explore societal issues through the prism of human centred design. DesignFix aims to spark discourse and prompt change on societal issues of international importance.

This year the focus was on recent political events; the polarisation of mainstream views, the growth of extremism spurred on by politicised social media and fake news leading to a growing feeling of alienation among many in society. Our goal was to investigate how design and technology can help address these issues and repair the dialogue between citizens and government.

We intend this paper to act as a reference for those seeking to re-establish public trust in government by promoting participatory democracy. The principles and suggestions outlined within are owner-agnostic and so are appropriate for any organisation (government, non-profit, commercial) that wishes to create channels for citizens to communicate with their public institutions or representatives.

Introduction

Over the past fifty years there has been a shift in how citizens perceive their efficacy over, and relationship with, public institutions.[1] Heightening negative sentiment has created growing distrust; which in recent years has manifested itself in the rise of anti-government populism. There are many contributing factors as to why this phenomenon has developed. The aim of this paper is not to tackle why it has developed, but to explore ways in which design might have a positive influence.
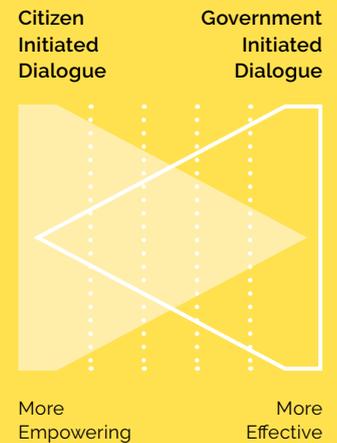
Our political systems are structured to be dictated by four and five year election cycles, but the modern world moves much faster.[2] People can order pizza with one tap on their smartphone, and multinational corporations respond to tweets within the hour, but we do not experience the same connectivity or response rate with government bodies or representatives. This lack of responsiveness means citizens have less agency over, and are more disconnected from, their public institutions.

Citizen-government communication, up to now, has relied on mass media to interpret and distribute news to citizens. The democratisation of media and the shift within mainstream media from information to 'infotainment' has greatly weakened this communication channel.[3] Social media's growing prevalence as a means of disseminating socio-political information has further disrupted the traditional channels of communication between government and citizens.

While technology has created certain expectations and challenges, it also harnesses opportunities to engage citizens in ways never before imagined. There is potential to foster direct dialogue between governments and their citizens, augmenting and even circumventing the need for mass media. To date, this dialogue has largely been government initiated and controlled (such as public consultations) and has rarely been effectively used as a platform to connect disenfranchised citizens.

By inviting citizens to actively participate in the legislative journey we can potentially restore trust in our civic organisations, particularly if the citizens are able to initiate these conversations and view their impact.

The objective of this research is to reconnect citizens with government, particularly the most marginalised or disillusioned in our societies; to drive participation in political conversations; and to ensure public representatives can effectively respond to citizen-driven correspondence.

1   Frantzich, S. (2005) 'Citizen Democracy; Political Activists in a Cynical Age' second edition, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

2   Timmermans, F. (2017) 'Trust in Times of Intense Scrutiny', Trust: The Fight to Win It Back, 12–13.

3   Thussu, D.K. (2007), 'News as Entertainment: The Rise of Global Infotainment', London: Sage Publications.

Citizen Initiated Dialogue   **Government Initiated Dialogue**

More Empowering   More Effective

Citizen-initiated dialogue can be a vehicle for reducing the disconnect between citizens and government.

Methodology

THIS PAPER IS THE RESULT OF A YEAR-LONG DESIGN EXPLORATION

Process

We began by identifying the issues contributing to the breakdown of dialogue between citizens and government. During this process the Frontend.com team met with industry, political, and civic thought leaders around the world to gain insights and test ideas.

Working in conjunction with our academic partners at the University of Limerick, NCAD and IADT Dun Laoghaire, we developed research projects for masters-level students to explore issues surrounding civic engagement and the experience of government policy in marginalised communities. These research projects were completed in February and March 2017.

In June 2017 we hosted a three-day design workshop that combined students selected from each of the participating universities with domain experts from the worlds of news, technology, social-media and politics. Working together with the Frontend.com design team, the workshop produced a diverse range of conceptual solutions that aim to use technology and design to address the issues identified with citizen-government communication. The workshop outputs formed the basis for further design exploration by the Frontend.com studio over the following months.

Insights

Throughout the research process we noted a growing awareness in government circles of the need for better citizen engagement. However, efforts are generally limited to public consultation processes around new policy. These government-initiated conversations do not allow citizens to raise their own concerns or ideas, and so propagate an inherent inequality. Citizens are left with few options but to campaign for their causes either online or in the streets, hoping to create enough disruption to make their voices heard. This amplifies the disconnect between citizens and government.

Citizens are left with few options but to campaign for their causes either online or in the streets, hoping to create enough disruption to make their voices heard.

Even in countries where governments are actively seeking to improve citizen dialogue, through better legislative process or through new technology, the challenge then becomes how to increase citizen contributions without overloading policymakers, so that those contributions can be listened to in a meaningful way. Technological advances such as Natural Language Processing and Machine Learning, as well as techniques for verifying news, were all raised as means of broadening communication and aiding listening.

Outcomes

Based upon our research, we created a set of design principles for citizen-initiated engagement. With the help of our partners Storyful and Publivate, we developed a viable design concept to visualise and communicate these principles in a real-world context. We outline this *'Moot'* concept at the end of this white paper.

Working with Service Republic in Cork County Council we ran a pilot study to test the effects of our design principles on citizens and policy-makers alike. Focusing on users of their *YourCouncil.ie* platform (a direct dialogue channel for citizens to report issues with the Council), We developed a questionnaire to understand the perceptions of users who received updates on the progress of their reports compared with those who did not. The results of this pilot study supported the intent behind our design principles.

The challenge becomes how to increase citizen contributions without then overloading policymakers.

Rules of Engagement

Seventy-five countries around the world have signed the *Open Government Declaration* stating that they will increase the availability of information about government activities, improve access to new technologies for openness and accountability, implement anti-corruption policies, and support civic participation.[4]

While a stated aim of the Open Government Partnership is to rebuild trust and strengthen our democracies, much of the early focus of civic engagement has been on government- initiated dialogue such as public consultations.

As design professionals, we at Frontend.com always strive to understand the needs of the users before creating solutions. Citizens want to be able to express themselves to their representatives at all times, not just when they are spoken to.

We believe citizen-initiated dialogue can be a powerful tool to improve citizens' sense of agency. To ensure that it can be implemented effectively we have developed these design principles for consideration.

Immediate
Easily accessible and engaging for the citizen.

Inclusive
Connect marginalised citizens.

Representative
Understand broader public sentiment.

Meaningful
Provide citizens with feedback to illustrate their impact.

Informative
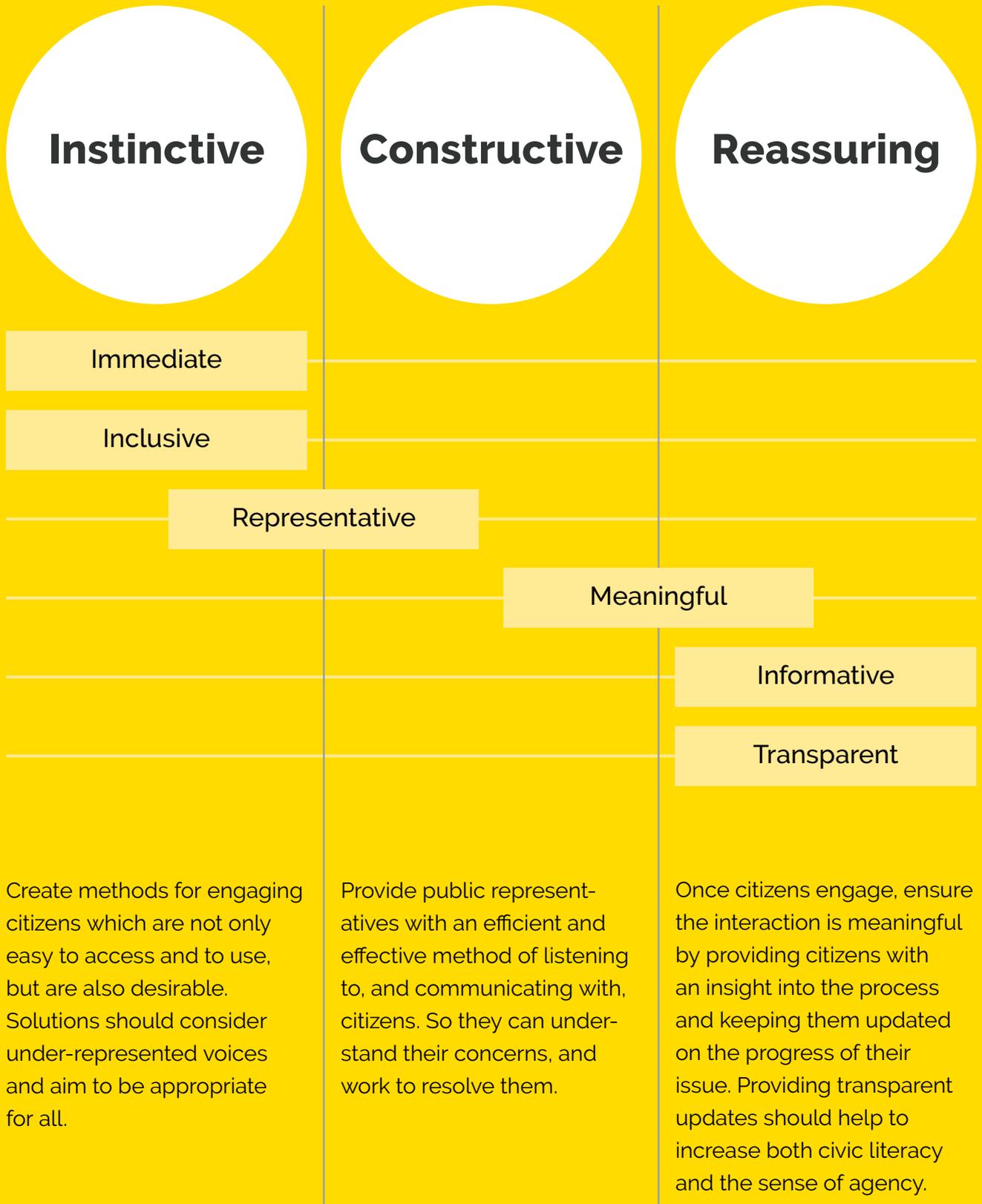*Help contextualise or challenge polarised viewpoints.*

Transparent
Each step of the process must be clear and open to the citizen.

We have developed these six design principles with the express goal of rebuilding trust by connecting citizens and government. There are other rationale for promoting direct dialogue which may focus on alternative principles.

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4   Open Government Declaration (2011) Open Government Partnership [online], available:
     https://www.opengovpartnership.org/open-government-declaration [accessed October 2017].

THE PRINCIPLES FIT INTO THREE CATEGORIES

Instinctive

Constructive

Reassuring

Immediate

Inclusive

Representative

Meaningful

Informative

Transparent

Create methods for engaging citizens which are not only easy to access and to use, but are also desirable. Solutions should consider under-represented voices and aim to be appropriate for all.

Provide public represent-atives with an efficient and effective method of listening to, and communicating with, citizens. So they can under-stand their concerns, and work to resolve them.

Once citizens engage, ensure the interaction is meaningful by providing citizens with an insight into the process and keeping them updated on the progress of their issue. Providing transparent updates should help to increase both civic literacy and the sense of agency.

Immediate

EASILY ACCESSIBLE AND ENGAGING FOR THE CITIZEN

Governments seeking to better serve and engage the public must commit to meeting people where they already are. In the physical world, the advantages of local specialized service provision are obvious. For example the sanitation department will be more successful if it collects household rubbish via curbside collection, not by requiring residents to carry their waste to a central dump.

The same is true, however, in the provision of digital services. Rather than requiring residents to download a stand-alone government feedback app or visit a specific government website – the equivalent of visiting a central office downtown. Governments can capitalize on the fact that residents are already engaged in dialogue and service use on the digital services they frequent daily. Facebook, Twitter, Venmo, Google, or other services are already deeply embedded in resident's lives, and these providers often have expertise and resources around digital service provision that governments may be hard-pressed to match.

CHELSEA MAULDIN
Director
Public Policy Lab

Empower citizens to initiate direct dialogue

Government-initiated public consultations are facilitated within the legislative journey, and can lead to more impactful civic engagement. However, they provide an extremely narrow window for citizens to feel invited to be part of the solution.

The official legislative journey from when an idea is mooted in government through public consultations, committee investigation, and finally parliament ratification, only represents a limited timeframe for citizens to raise, or question, ideas.

More recently, many governments have explored citizen-led dialogue such as the *Better Reykjavik*[5] platform which allows citizens to submit their ideas, create a discussion, and effect change in the local government. A similar platform, *Gwanghwamoon 1st Street.*[6] was developed in South Korea with the express purpose of re-establishing faith and confidence following the corruption drama that led to the impeachment of former president Park Geun-hye.[7]

Providing a direct communication channel allows citizens to connect with their public representatives or institutions, and gives them an avenue to share their concerns or ideas without the need to start an online campaign or protest for their voices to be heard by government. Their participation moves them from being active opponents to constructive advisors.

Utilise familiar channels

Any system, platform, or channel for citizen engagement will have inherent biases built in. A digital text-based solution can exclude the elderly and people with learning disabilities.[8] Standalone web-portals will likely be used only by those who are already politically engaged: an outcome which would fail to meet our set objective of engaging the most disenfranchised citizens.

From our research we established that the most inclusive solution would be a channel-agnostic system, where citizens could communicate via applications that they already use. For most citizens email inputs would be sufficient. However we found that some citizens (particularly in marginalised communities) were unfamiliar with email so system designers should consider alternative channels.

5   Better Reykjavik, [online], available: https://betrireykjavik.is [accessed October 2017].

6   Gwanghwamoon 1st Street [online], available: https://www.gwanghwamoon1st.go.kr [accessed October 2017].

7   FTI Consulting (2017) 'Moon Launches Digital Channel to Embrace Public Opinion' [online] available: http://fticommunications.com/2017/06/digitized-collective-policy-making-korea-messaging-platforms-get-money-business-india-singapores-first-family-feud-spills-onto-facebook/ [accessed October 2017].

Integrating with widely used services, rather than building a standalone platform, is likely to result in a more representative pool of users. Where the goal is to wean people off expressing themselves on closed social networks, then system designers need to allow citizens to share their ideas and issues just as easily onto this platform, where they can effect real change.

While any online tool is likely to exclude some group of people, either due to accessibility issues, learning difficulties, or limited technological literacy, it is important to understand how such groups could be affected and to ensure offline functional equivalents exist for them.

Avoid creating barriers

Forty eight percent of Americans are classified as Interested Bystanders.[9] meaning they pay attention to issues around them, but do not actively voice their opinions or take actions on those issues. Interested Bystanders weigh the benefits of taking part against the personal costs of time, money, attention, and hassle.[10]

This is a sizable percentage of the US population who, with reduced barriers and given the right circumstances, may be prompted to civic engagement. The challenge is to identify these obstacles, many of which will be unique to specific locations, and create solutions which include even the most disenfranchised citizens.

Such barriers could be pre-existing, for example where citizens perceive that their input will not be listened to, or will be lost in the large systems of bureaucracy. A lack of civic literacy was also cited throughout our research as a major barrier to engagement.

However, technological solutions themselves often create new barriers. In a system designed to bridge the gap between citizens and public representatives it can be surprisingly easy to exclude marginalised groups. Two notable areas of tension include the poor design and wording of input forms, and the need for citizens to prove their identity. System designers need to consider, and mitigate against both types of barrier. Any platform which fails to address social barriers will fail to connect with the most excluded in our communities.

A key challenge is to achieve a balance between seamless engagement and verification of the identity of a citizen. This needs to work for both the time-pressured citizen and the constituency-aware public representative. Neither benefit from a system flooded with messages from chatbots.

However, if identification processes are too onerous it would likely create a new barrier between citizens and representatives. At best this would discourage some from engaging regularly, for others it could completely exclude them from access to their representatives.

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8 pTools (2016) 'Digital Social Exclusion and Public Service Organisations' [online], available: http://m.ptools.com/Blog/Digital-Social-Exclusion-and-Public-Service-Organisations.html [accessed October 2017].

9 Krontiris, K., Webb, J., Krontiris, C. and Chapman, C., 'Understanding America's "Interested Bystander;" A Complicated Relationship with Civic Duty' [online], available: https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4Nqm_QFLwnLNTZYLXp6azhqNTg/view [accessed October 2017].

10 Chisnell, D. (2017) 'The Epic Journey of American Voters', Center for Civic Design [online], available: https://civicdesign.org/the-epic-journey-of-american-voters/ [accessed September 2017].

Inclusive

CONNECT MARGINALISED CITIZENS

How can we
encourage people
to share their
thoughts with
officials rather
than with their
Facebook friends?

Citizens must feel their thoughts are wanted

Throughout our research we heard that many citizens require advocates to encourage them to raise their issues with elected officials. These advocates highlight that citizens are not asking for a favour or bothering their public representative, but actually helping them to better understand an issue (which is also likely to be an issue for other voters within their constituencies).

Any new system should be designed in parallel with a comprehensive strategy to promote civic engagement. Citizens need to be made aware that the doors of government are opening and they are invited in.

Many citizens will need strong prompts to utilise any new platforms or channels to communicate with their public representatives or institutions. System designers must ask themselves: 'how can we encourage people to share their thoughts with officials, rather than their Facebook friends?'

Developers of such a system must not focus solely on the technological platform, but rather on creating a new environment. Citizens need to feel welcome and invited to share their issues and concerns through this new system. A significant shift in public attitude must take place, reshaping expectations of the role of citizen. The goal must be to realign perceptions, moving away from hoarding ideas, and towards sharing them. Keeping an idea to oneself means that no one else can act on that idea. Campaigns promoting the system must prove that sharing an idea is an act of participation in civic life, that one's ideas are part of the public good, and that this sharing is vital to good citizenship.

Beyond attitudes, campaigns must also address behavioural changes, encouraging citizens to participate not just every four or five years at election time, but in an ongoing manner. Like the internationally successful *'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle'* campaign, this is not just about providing the tools, but also the education, the expectations, and the incentives for widespread adoption.

Help articulate issues and concerns

According to a 2013 Pew study, the greatest barriers to civic participation are income and education.[11] Many citizens with lower levels of education struggle to articulate ideas or issues clearly, particularly in writing.

For citizen-initiated engagement to be effective, the messages to representatives should ideally be actionable; but at the very least should be understandable.

Currently, there are many volunteers and advocacy organisations who work with people who have lower levels of education to fill in forms or write emails of complaints. In some cases these advocates may construct the text themselves. In other situations they simply may review the citizen's draft to ensure they are expressing themselves and their position correctly. While this advocacy role is sometimes essential, the need for it indicates another barrier for marginalised members of society.

Any system that seeks to gather public input should be mindful of the basic communication challenges which many experience. Their fears and difficulties must be appreciated and, where possible, provisions made to help frame and articulate the contributions people wish to make.

One method is to help citizens to structure their messages. A form, or conversational interface, such as a chatbot, could prompt them along the way, breaking their message into suitable steps so that it will be easily comprehensible, and potentially actionable.

Digital tools present a great opportunity to scale-up and to broaden engagement opportunities, but tactical choices around how such tools are rolled out embody a focal touchpoint between government and citizens, and this interface needs to be designed accordingly.

For example, a disillusioned and unengaged citizen who feels and that they are not listened to risks only having those feelings reinforced when greeted by some chatbot that tries to pattern-match and interpret their perspective against some data model.

This risk doesn't mean that progressive tools such as chatbots should be avoided. Instead it means that such techniques must be selected strategically, and should emphasize transparency – framing their role clearly and supporting (rather than replacing) a robust listening strategy.

BRYCE COLENBRANDER
Lead Strategist
Publivate

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11 Pew Research Center (2013), 'Civic Engagement in the Digital Age' [online], available:
http://www.pewinternet.org/files/old-media//Files/Reports/2013/PIP_CivicEngagementin theDigitalAge.pdf
[accessed October 2017].

Representative

UNDERSTAND BROADER PUBLIC SENTIMENT

To better understand the needs of citizens requires balancing an analysis-led approach with listening to lived experience. Technology helps to capture and aggregate experience as data. But it is crucial that systems be designed in a way that maintain inclusivity, diversity, and nuance – and being all the while digestible by those who have committed to listening.

The narrative of lived experience alone might be mere opinion, but a data-centric approach devoid of narrative risks disconnection. The two must converge to create understanding.

Finding the right balance is elusive and involves making trade-offs, but to be able to listen better at scale is an essential outcome, and digital means bring us ever closer.

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Reduce grandstanding through genuine dialogue

While transparency is important, online public polls do not generate genuine conversations. Polls automatically create a public-versus-government sentiment as they often attract hard-line views, which stifle dialogue and discourage all parties from constructive conversations.

Online polls also lead to gamification. Lobby groups encourage their members to flood polls and skew perceptions of public opinion. One notable example was the Israeli Megaphone application which informed users of any online polls taking place worldwide believed to be of interest to the state of Israel. It prompted them to auto-submit responses intended to influence results to display pro-Israel sentiment.[12]

Online campaigns are most effective at rallying large numbers when they paint a black-and-white picture. The goal of the campaign creator moves away from sharing facts, and towards building critical mass by winning hearts and minds. They exclude public representatives by default and create a battlefield-like mindset against them. These combative public methods of engaging create defensive distance between concerned citizens and their public representatives and institutions.

A direct dialogue channel where citizens connect with officials or representatives could help remove the grandstanding that occurs on those public communication forums. By applying the principles proposed in this paper, such channels could become a method for hosting constructive, genuine conversations.

Compared to online polls and campaigns which typically foster division and reduce communication, direct human-to-human conversations can lead to greater understanding of the true needs of citizens (for representatives), and of the challenges facing policy-makers (for citizens). Although direct dialogue may not be appropriate in every scenario, fluid communication between representatives and citizens has the potential to empower and better inform both citizens and representatives.

12 Purvis, S. (2006) 'Israel ups the stakes in the propaganda war', The Guardian [online], available:
https://www.theguardian.com/media/2006/nov/20/mondaymediasection.israel [accessed October 2017].

Gather insights beyond the inbox

Typically, citizens who are passionate enough to reach out usually have clear-cut opinions, or are directly affected by the policy which they are making representations on.[13] Ideally, policymakers need to make decisions based upon the broader stakeholders, and not just on those inclined to engage.

Policymakers must seek to understand the broader public sentiment on issues. For officials, the full range of these sentiments can be challenging to uncover. The difficulties citizens have in sharing opinions with public institutions means that, for most governments today, it is global corporations such as Facebook and Twitter, who actually have far greater insights into public sentiment on their policies than they do. Citizens turn to familiar easy-to-access portals to vent, debate and propose ideas. This gives those social media platforms a wealth of knowledge far beyond the reach of government.

However, it is important that policymakers look beyond the correspondence in their inbox and understand the wider context when trying to meet citizen's needs. While there is little appetite for the social media platforms to share insights with public bodies, policymakers must incorporate as broad an input as possible.

Policymakers need to be mindful about the type of sentiment data they scrap from online sources; not only the sources they are pulling from, but also the weight they give that data when making policy decisions.

The base foundation of traditional sentiment analysis is that the human conditional response to stimuli can be mapped as either positive, or negative or a grey area in between. It is a scary proposal to think that such raw numbers would be major driver for validating a policy decision.

Human emotion is not so linear. Even if a paragraph of text has an overriding positive sentiment, there may be an emotional response hidden within the context that a human reader would understand as outweighing all other positive indicators.

Therefore these technological advances, while beneficial in a macro sense, must be grouped with human interventions when evaluating policy decisions. Basically truth is found in the context.

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Storyful

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13 Black, A. 'Public Consultations: UK Experience', World Health Organisation [online], available: http://www.who.int/fctc/8-2-Effective_domestic_consultation-UK.pdf [accessed October 2017].

Meaningful

PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH FEEDBACK TO ILLUSTRATE THEIR IMPACT

It is not enough for citizens to either feel heard or to be heard, both are critical in the effort to restore public trust.

Ensure citizen feedback is heard

Don Lenihan argues that "treating people's views with respect is what makes participation meaningful".[14] Citizen input is effectively pointless unless it is heard. So achieving buy-in from public officials and representatives is the key factor for success.

The amount of content and correspondence public representatives are expected to manage has dramatically increased in recent years. A report by the US Congressional Management Foundation notes a 548 percent increase in the volume of mail sent to Senators between 2002 and 2008.[15]

The reality today is that citizen-engagement and consultation processes are already inefficient and straining. Unheard citizen input only deepens divisions between citizens and government; further eroding public trust.[16] It is not enough for citizens to either feel heard or to be heard, both are critical in the effort to restore public trust.

Any system which accepts citizen input should make all such correspondence as easy as possible to review and act upon. This is the greatest challenge facing all such systems.

Consider integrating citizen deliberation

Technological advances have reached a point where governments can now provide meaningful methods for citizens to be directly responsible for decision making.[17] Where appropriate, citizens can now be handed more responsibility as decision-makers, not just as idea-raisers.

The legislative journey is divided into four phases: Idea Generation; Understanding; Deliberation; Action. The Action phase will always be the remit of the State, but in certain circumstances there is potential to open the Deliberation phase to citizens. Being directly part of the process from generation to deliberation can be hugely empowering and impactful for citizens.

One successful example of this is participatory budgeting in Paris. On inception the citizen-defined budget was less than twenty million Euro. This has since expanded to one hundred million Euro. Over one-hundred and fifty thousand citizens voted directly on the budget in 2016.[18] with most voting through the online platform.

14 Lenihan, D. (2017) 'Open Dialogue can Resolve Value Conflicts', Trust: The Fight to Win It Back, 32–33.

15 Congressional Management Foundation (2008) 'How Citizen Advocacy Is Changing Mail Operations on Capitol Hill' [online], available: http://www.congressfoundation.org/storage/documents/CMF_Pubs/cwc_citizen engagement.pdf [accessed October 2017].

16 Pradhan, P. (2017) 'An Open Government Approach to Rebuilding Citizen Trust', Trust: The Fight to Win It Back, 8–9.

Participatory budgeting was also introduced in the Democratic Republic of Congo's South Kivu Province, where they invited citizens to vote on budget allocation for local community initiatives. When citizens saw the new health centres and road repairs that they voted for, tax collection increased sixteen-fold.[19] By involving the general public in the deliberations, and by demonstrating the impact of their choices, cynicism was reduced and replaced with an increased level of trust in government.

Demonstrate the citizen's impact back to them

Positive behaviour should be reinforced to keep citizens engaged and further their participation.

We conducted a pilot study with Cork County Council in Ireland. We noted that engaged citizens who received updates on the progress of their requests had a thirty percent more favourable opinion of their local government. Also they were almost twenty percent more likely to feel their personal potential impact on wider society. When providing feedback and demonstrating the impact of their contribution, we found citizens to hold a more positive assessment of their personal efficacy, even if their initiative was ultimately unsuccessful.

A larger study, looking at the *Fix My Street* portal, showed that a successful first experience of reporting an issue through this platform resulted in a 57 percent increase in the probability of a citizen submitting a second report.[20] The same study noted the importance of responsiveness for fostering an active citizenry and suggested that "genuine responsiveness to citizens' input encourages greater participation".

Regardless of outcome, it is paramount that the citizen understands their voice was at least considered. Sjoberg claims "practitioners should seek to design processes that clearly highlight to individuals the actual importance of their participation so that their perceived efficacy increases".

In 2015, a perceptions study was carried out by Cork County Council with citizens, businesses and staff which identified the needs for greater access to, and information from, the Council; communication was lacking.

Since that time we have developed Service Republic, the Council's service design team to explore citizen-centred needs. An early initiative leading from the perception study was the *YourCouncil.ie* portal which provides a clear communication channel for citizens to report their issues. It is seen as an important communication tool between the Council and its customers and using the feedback, as a way to allow customers to become part of the development and enhancement of Council services.

We believe that keeping customers informed about the progress of their initiative is critical to their overall experience of the service, provides transparency about the delivery process, and allows them to feel connected with the Council.

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17   Simon, J., Bass, T., Boelman, V. and Mulgan, G. (2017) 'Digital Democracy; The tools transforming political engagement', Nesta, 27.

18   The Participatory Budget of the City of Paris (2016) Mairie-De-Paris [online], available: https://www.paris.fr/actualites/the-participatory-budget-of-the-city-of-paris-4151 [accessed October 2017].

19   World Bank, 'Social Accountability Case Examples: Information Communication Technologies (ICTS)' [online], available: https://saeguide.worldbank.org/sites/worldbank.org.saeguide/files/documents/ICT%20AFR%20South%20Kivu%20.pdf [accessed October 2017].

20   Sjoberg, F. M., Mellon, J. and Peixoto, T. (2017), 'The Effect of Bureaucratic Responsiveness on Citizen Participation', Public Admin Rev, 77: 340–351, doi:10.1111/puar.12697

Informative

HELP CONTEXTUALISE OR CHALLENGE POLARISED VIEWPOINTS

Updates can provide the citizen with a glimpse into the work of government that is usually reserved for lobbyists, journalists, and those closer to the legislative journey.

Realise educational potential

As previously noted, one of the biggest barriers to engagement is civic literacy. Opening a direct dialogue channel and updating citizens on their issues represents a significant opportunity to provide information to engaged citizens and make them aware of the large impact of small wins.

These opportunities to improve civic literacy can occur at every stage of the engagement. Before a citizen starts any dialogue they need be encouraged to engage: either by providing them with clear communication channels, or by inviting them to government-initiated consultations.

Education should extend to when citizens are actively engaging. This can include highlighting the next steps involved in handling their requests, providing relevant contextual information and directing them to other conversations on their issue (such as live public consultations).

Once the citizen takes the step to interact on a subject, they will likely want updates on the progress of their idea. Keeping them updated on their impact and the general work being undertaken on the issue could be a core function of this communication channel. Updates can provide the citizen with a glimpse into the work of government that is usually reserved for lobbyists, journalists, and those closer to the legislative journey.

21 Moy, P. and Pfau, M. (2000) 'With Malice Toward All?: The Media and Public Confidence in Democratic Institutions,' Westport: Praeger.

Challenge assumptions

Misinformation and negative narratives play a large part in citizen's disillusionment with government.[21] The dominance of social networks as the means of accessing news, and the democratisation of news outlets has made citizens more vulnerable to distorted representations of facts.

A direct dialogue channel reporting back to citizens on issues they have previously raised, or challenging them as they introduce new issues, could be an effective way to create a better-informed citizenry.

Direct dialogue channels provide opportunities to inject non-partisan context into civic conversations. Such as providing system-driven contextual information such as expert reports, details of existing programmes, international comparisons, or asking questions and providing assumed answers compared against factual data.

Providing such information could potentially reduce the volume of messages to officials and public representatives. So when citizens engage on an issue where answers exist and activity is already underway, the system can provide them with specific relevant information. With this insight, they may no longer have a need to seek a reply from their public representative, freeing that representative to connect with other citizens.

At first glance, it seems easy to vote. You register to vote, learn about the issue and candidates on the ballot, and vote. But the voter journey is not so simple. For most voters, taking part in an election is not a neat orderly process, but one that starts with the last question – what's on my ballot – and then works backwards to figure out how to vote.

Each step of this process is an opportunity for micro barriers that discourage participation, and those barriers are magnified for people with fewer civic resources. Disability, civic disengagement, low literacy – any form of marginalization – all magnify the barriers, making the simple act of voting into an epic journey.

Reimagining civic participation so that the journey is clear and each step designed to connect, means working with communities to understand their needs and designing government services that meet them on their own terms.

WHITNEY QUESENBERY
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PRINCIPLE SIX

Transparent

EACH STEP OF THE PROCESS MUST BE CLEAR AND OPEN TO THE CITIZEN

Citizens engage with the expectations that their voices will be combined with others to help shape their public representatives' positions.

Report citizen representations

According to Frans Timmermans, "Obscurity is the best friend of conspiracy".[22] While Open Government initiatives centre their discussion on the need for transparency in public life, too often we observe examples of leaks and evaded questioning which compound many negative narratives about government.

The process of decision-making is complex. Capturing all of the inputs that can influence each decision-maker is a nigh impossible task. However, there is a growing acknowledgement that to reduce corruption, and the perception of corruption, lobbyists must sign up to a register before meeting with political leaders, and have those meetings recorded. Also, results of public consultations and expert reports, need to be open-by-default for citizens to review. Although not widely read, these documents share valuable insights among society at large, and allow citizens to hold elected officials accountable for their decisions.

Were citizens to become a more integral part of the legislative process through digital channels, then their representations should also be recorded and made available to all. In some jurisdictions there may be legal hurdles to pass, but ideally this would be done in a manner that provides information on citizens and their representations at a macro level, so as to protect their identity and not discourage them from sharing personal thoughts or experiences.

Again, a fine balance must be struck here. Achieving parity between the requirement for the public to see what criteria representatives are basing their decisions upon, and the contrasting requirement to make civic engagement a more desirable experience for citizens.

Create evidence trails

Citizens engage with the expectations that their voices will be combined with others to help shape their public representatives' positions. The expectation being that their concerns or suggestions will be considered. Sometimes this means that final legislation will include parts of their recommendations, other times it means that for one reason or another it will not. Today, it is near-impossible for citizens to know if their input was considered, to what degree it was considered, what effect it has had on legislation, or why (and when) it was excluded.

22 Timmermans, F. (2017) 'Trust in Times of Intense Scrutiny', Trust: The Fight to Win It Back, 12-13.

A system that tracks messages sent to representatives has the potential to shed light on this process. Contributing to the dialogue is an important first step, but citizens may also want to follow the endpoint of that dialogue through the different routes and channels it ultimately travels. For example, if a committee hearing leads to a position paper that includes suggestions raised by citizens, the system could automatically trigger a notification to those citizens showing them the development. As the legislation progresses, there is potential for policymakers to note why certain aspects have not progressed and bring the citizenry closer to the process.

Physical disconnect from government is a real issue, "In the UK, the further away you are from London, the lower levels of trust there are in government and by the time you get to Scotland trust in government hovers around 19 percent."[23] The power of digital systems to bring the process closer to citizens must not be underestimated.

These evidence trails do not need to be solely viewable by those who have engaged on each issue. By opening up the review process, the society at large can gain insights into inputs and decisions along the legislative journey.

It will be important for public representatives and officials to explain why they reached a certain decision and provide access to the information and contributions they used to reach that decision (be that contributions from the public, expert advice, overall public opinion, and so on). This will allow people to understand why the decision was made and also educate them on how to make effective and convincing contributions in the future. In this light, the concept of transparency shifts from being a buzz word to something which can provide tangible benefits, both for the public who demand dependable institutions and the representatives who can demonstrate a logical (or at least defendable) trail as to how they arrived at their conclusions. Transparency can be more than just instilling trust, it can be utilised as a means of educating people, highlighting what policymakers are hearing beyond public opinion and media reporting.

The public need to understand how their contributions have an impact on the political process. Seeing this first-hand will help advance trust in the process and encourage repeat engagement.

> By opening up the review process, the society at large can gain insights into inputs and decisions along the legislative journey.

23 Larkins, S. (2016) 'Can changing how we communicate improve trust in Government?' [speech] Feb 2016, New Zealand, [online], available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95DyTKjJuYY [accessed October 2017].

Moot

REALISING THE DESIGN PRINCIPLES
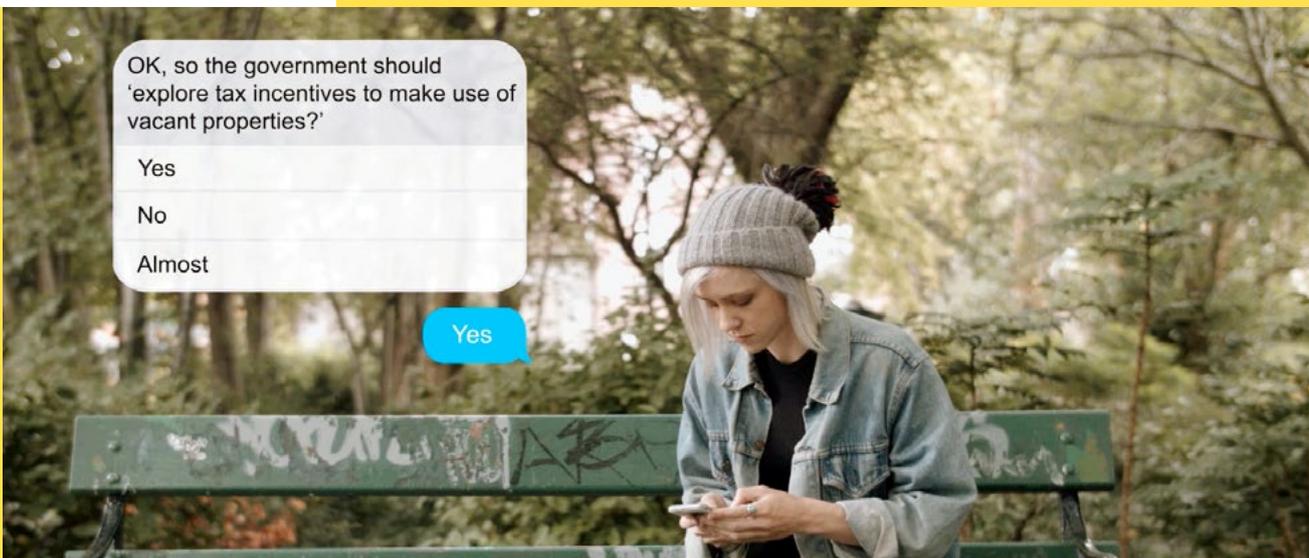## IN A REAL-WORLD CONTEXT

Moot: verb
To raise a question or
topic for discussion.

To suggest an idea
or possibility.

Moot: noun
An assembly
held for debate.

A regular gathering
of people having a
common interest.

As part of a collaboration undertaken with the University of Limerick, the National College of Art & Design, and IADT Dun Laoghaire, Frontend.com sought to explore a viable concept which would make these design principles tangible.

The result was a design concept, named *Moot*, which allows citizens who wish to share their ideas or concerns with public representatives to interact with a conversational interface; either through email or messaging apps they are familiar with. An AI-powered client accepts those messages, understands them, and replies back to the citizen on the same channel. Algorithms within the AI client are designed to help the citizen articulate their point, contextualise their thinking, and, where appropriate, answer their question or present them with useful information.

The conversation is structured to help the system understand the general intent of the citizen's issue and to aggregate it with other messages sharing that intent. This greatly reduces the level of noise for public representatives, enabling them to host more thorough conversations with their constituents. By making it easier for public representatives to hear what their constituents are saying, the citizen's engagement becomes more meaningful and potentially more impactful for both parties.

Through a logged-in portal, the public representative can see which themes within a topic have the most support, how contentious they are, and reply to citizens individually or in a group. For further insight, they can ask questions back to their constituents and easily review replies to those. Representatives can set replies to be automatically sent to any future constituents sending related messages.
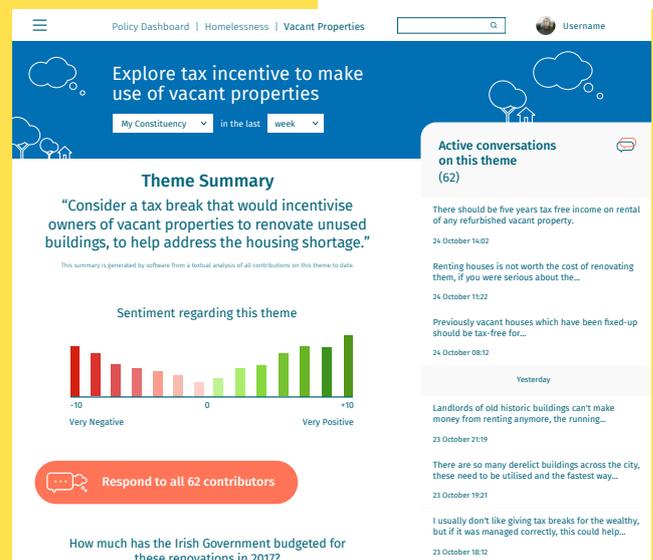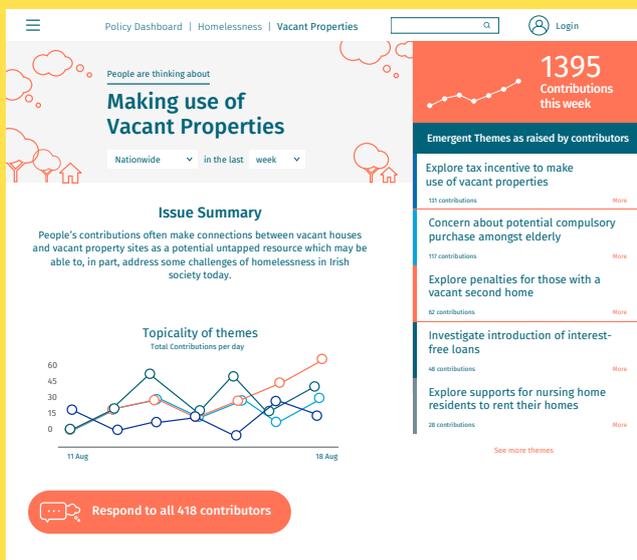
Representatives can also review data on each topic collected from other sources; such as official parliamentary transcripts and mentions in government reports. To help contextualise what they may be hearing against general public sentiment, they are presented with trending media being shared on each topic.

Citizens, while not initially engaging in one-on-one conversations, are enabled to have a constructive conversation with their public represent-ative. The feedback loop, which automatically sends a message to the citizen whenever there is action on their topic, is central to the concept. This means that citizens are updated when a lobbied representative raises their issue in parliament, or if their idea is included in a report or legislation.

This feedback loop demonstrates the impact the citizen has, illuminates the confusion surrounding the work of government, and encourages further participation on issues of interest.

WWW.FRONTEND.COM/ENGAGE

Citizens are enabled to have a constructive conversation with their public representative.

In partnership with UL, NCAD, and IADT.
With the support of Storyful, Publivate, and Service Republic.

Conclusion

"Simply reducing corruption or increasing transparency will not in itself restore trust in government. We must find ways to …reduce bad information and incivility in cyberspace, and enable government to function more effectively again."[24]

"The only real antidote to the appeal of post-fact, quasi-authoritarian populism is a more principled, disciplined, and effective approach to Open Dialogue."[25]

As the political and social environment has changed, democratic institutions must adapt, as they have in the past. Previous technological advances, such as radio or twenty-four hour news cycles, were minor changes to the established communication model. Each made it easier for government to communicate policies to society, while also improving public access to information. However, the challenges facing political discourse today are more complex. The fragmentation and polarisation of media sources has undermined the central political narrative, leading to information disarray and breakdowns in communication between citizens and government. To repair this dialogue we need more dynamic and direct connections between citizens and their public institutions.

The future is disruptive. The new technologies available today create possibilities for democracy which were unimaginable until now. Citizens can question policy, construct collaborative solutions and engage, and be engaged, like never before. It is the responsibility of practitioners, policymakers and government to incorporate these new technologies, consider the merits of improving citizen-government communication, and use technology to combat anti-government populism.

This paper outlines the need to extend the focus of Open Government activities beyond government-initiated engagements which, in terms of trust, are unlikely to change the perceptions of disenfranchised citizens.

Governments need to champion clear communication channels so their citizens can better express their own concerns or ideas. Using the six design principles outlined in this paper they can ensure these systems are: immediate for citizens to access, inclusive, representative of all views, meaningful, promote greater understanding through information, and transparent.

Such a transformation in citizen-government communication can realise this singular opportunity to truly open government. ■

Practitioners, policymakers and government must consider the merits of improving citizen-government communication, and use technology to combat anti-government populism.

24 Diamond, L. (2017) 'The Political Drivers of Low Trust', Trust: The Fight to Win It Back, 10–11.

25 Lenihan, D. (2017) 'What is "Open Dialogue" and is it the Answer to "Post Fact" Populism?', Canada2020.

ABOUT FRONTEND.COM

Frontend.com is an international UX design consultancy based in Dublin, Ireland. Founded in 1998, we have been at the forefront of UX design for almost two decades. In that time we have shaped how people engage with a broad spectrum of new technologies and services. Our global client base spans the worlds of finance, software, consumer products and medicine, and our work has helped transform products, services and organisations around the globe.

The key to creating effective user experience stems from understanding people. Our approach puts the end-user at the heart of the design process, ensuring the solution meets their needs. From in-depth research and collaborative design methods to user testing and formal human factors validation, we involve users at all stages of our process to create truly user-centred solutions.

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ABOUT DESIGNFIX 2017

DesignFix is a collaborative social design programme run by Frontend.com. It brings student and professional designers together to explore societal issues through the prism of human centred design. DesignFix aims to spark discourse and prompt change on societal issues of international importance.

This year the focus was on recent political events; the polarisation of mainstream views, the growth of extremism spurred on by politicised social media and fake news leading to a growing feeling of alienation among many in society. Our goal was to investigate how design and technology can help address these issues and repair the dialogue between citizens and government.

We intend this paper to act as a reference for those seeking to re-establish public trust in government by promoting participatory democracy. The principles and suggestions outlined within are owner-agnostic and so are appropriate for any organisation (government, non-profit, commercial) that wishes to create channels for citizens to communicate with their public institutions or representatives.