

**Public Information and Community Engagement Resources  
for  
Municipal and Community Leaders**

**Sustainable Pittsburgh**

**Updated March 27, 2020**

**March 27, 2020: [Statement from the Pennsylvania's District Attorney's Association](#)**

*"...the best advice we can provide is non-technical. We would recommend that when officials are not able to comply with the Act, they seek other ways of complying with the spirit of the law, which is to ensure that the public at large has an opportunity to view their government in action. This may be accomplished through conference calls, video chats, transcription of meetings or otherwise recording the meeting and making the recording publicly available or otherwise accessible."*

**GENERAL RESOURCES:**

**[Deliberative Democracy Consortium](#)** - brings together practitioners and researchers to come up with reports and case studies of how governments can connect with citizens through public participation

**[Govtech.com](#)** article on "[4 Ways to Get Citizens Excited to Engage](#)" provides strategies for thoughtful public engagement

**[Institute for Local Government](#)** - provides practical, impartial and easy to use resources related to public engagement, including with immigrants, through technology, how to respond to challenges, etc. (916) 658-8208

**[Municipal Research and Services Center \(MRSC\)](#)** - a nonprofit focused on supporting local governments through consultation and free resources; provides a comprehensive list of best practices, tools, case studies and research geared around effective communication and public participation, from using technology to reach the citizenry, to engaging volunteers, to communication strategies, and more. [mrsc@mrsc.org](mailto:mrsc@mrsc.org) | (800) 933-6772

**[National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation](#)** - created a 9 page "Engagement Streams Framework" which outlines proven practices to introduce new information to the public and get their input, and breaks down each technique to show who should participate, length of time and size of group

**[Pennsylvania League of Municipalities \(PML\)](#)**- an advocacy organization for PA municipal governments. Please find more info on Right to Know [here](#) and for the Sunshine Law [here](#).

**[Nonprofit Tech for Good](#)** - offers free webinars, blog posts and other resources providing tips and advice effectively use social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, Google+, etc.). While it is geared around nonprofits, the information can easily apply to local governments. [heather@nptechforgood.com](mailto:heather@nptechforgood.com)

**[PlaceMatters](#)** - a Denver based non-profit think tank for civic engagement and process in planning, creating opportunities for informed, inclusive decision making in the planning of vibrant cities and communities. [info@placematters.org](mailto:info@placematters.org)

**[The Participatory Budgeting Project](#)** - a nonprofit that supports municipalities in participatory budgeting with toolkits, trainings and other resources. For a fee they will also provide advanced training, on the ground support and facilitation of the public process. [info@participatorybudgeting.org](mailto:info@participatorybudgeting.org) | 347-652-1478

**The Sunlight Foundation** - a national go-to resource for best practices on open government: 202-742-1520

#### **TOOLS FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT -EMAIL, MOBILE & PHONE:**

**Google Forms** - a free way to create a form or questionnaire that can be embedded into an email or on a website

**GovPilot** - fee based platform that allows departments to go paperless and connect through an internal dashboard, share data, set up work flows, communication with constituents through notifications , create map visualizations using GIS and create forms online so residents can submit requests, pay obligations, register for services, etc. 201.222.1155 (NJ users: Morristown, Passaic City, Union Township)

**Nixie** - a mobile and email application that will provide community announcements and emergency alerts to the public, some for free including emergency and public safety alerts

**Periscope** - a platform to live broadcast from a smartphone

**Poll Everywhere** - a fee-based polling platform based on size of audience; allows for real time polling

**Survey Gizmo** - a fee-based email & mobile survey tool

**Survey Monkey** - a fee-based survey tool for email & mobile

**TeleTownhall** - allows users to hold public meetings over the phone and web

**Telephone Townhall** - allows users to hold public meetings over the phone and web

**Textizen** - a fee-based (set up and training fees) platform that allows sending project updates, event reminders, surveys or polls to the public; uses a web based platform where towns can easily analyze data . Get [examples of cities](#) using the tool.)

#### **TOOLS FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT - ONLINE COLLABORATION:**

**Google Moderator** - a free way to start discussions around topics, gain access through a free Google account.

**Granicus** - a fee-based citizen participation tool that allows people to comment on upcoming public meeting agendas through an online form

**IdeaScale** - a free online forum to vet ideas, vote, and discuss feedback. (Example: [Austin, TX](#) uses for public voting on issues)

**Loomio** - a free collaborative decision-making tool where anyone can suggest an idea and others can vote and comment on that idea; municipal officials can use it to share policy proposals with their constituency

**Mind Mixer** - a fee-based tool to crowd source input on policy or planning proposals or visioning processes

- Examples: "[Sustainable Southfield](#)" (MI) uses Mind Mixer to gather input as it is updating its master plan; [Maplewood, MN](#) leads discussions with residents around various quality of life issues using the platform; "[Inspire Boulder](#)" (CO) uses Mind Mixer as a 24/7 digital town hall; [Maryland's bus network](#) asks residents to join the discussion on its transportation planning process

**NeighborLand** - collaborative tool between neighborhood and city officials and planning departments in order to pose questions, collect feedback, and create actions out of proposals. (Examples: San Francisco, Houston, Portland and Lowell, MA use for visioning and planning projects)

**NextDoor** - a free private website for neighborhoods to connect and share information; people must show proof of address to gain access in order to keep the membership genuine; police departments use it to post updates, news, safety alerts, tip requests, etc. (Example: New York City uses NextDoor to provide residents with updates and generate discussions around issues)

**Open Town Hall** - a fee-based platform for officials and citizens to post proposals, and others can comment on the ideas

**PLANETCIVIC** - an online platform for civic engagement where elected officials and town residents can collectively and constructively set the priorities for their town. Requires proof address to gain access. The platform also includes a utility to highlight all available volunteering opportunities in town.

#### TOOLS FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT - SOCIAL MEDIA:

**Facebook** - a free site where a town can engage its residents by starting discussions, sharing events, etc.

**Instagram** - a free photo sharing (Sacramento Police Department use for their "Day in the Life" series: <https://instagram.com/sacramentopolice/>)

**Twitter** - a free platform to share news, updates, photos, and start conversations through live Twitter chats

**YouTube** - a free video sharing of speeches, TV appearances, archived public meetings, PSAs, etc.; use Insight function to see who is viewing videos; second biggest search engine after Google

#### TOOLS FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT- VISUALIZATIONS:

**Google Fusion** - a free, easy to use application that creates maps that tell stories from the simple uploading of a spreadsheet . Examples: [NYC Comptroller](#); [NJ Spotlight](#); [WNYC](#)

**Info graphics** - a powerful way to tell a story through visualizations. There are sites you can use to create info graphics for free: [Tableau Public](#) , [PicktoChart](#)

**UStream** - a free way to livestream public meetings; also have monthly plans that provide customizable support; equipment to attach to your camera in order to broadcast live will still be needed, such as Cerevo Live Shell which has been found by some as cost effective and reliable