

Transportation Outreach Planner

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Public Outreach Strategies

Instant Polling Technology

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Recommended Target Groups

Education

College Education
High School Diploma
No High School Diploma

Language

Creole
Other
Spanish

Disability

Hearing Impaired
Other
Physically Challenged
Sight Impaired

Income

Low Income
Middle to Affluent

Vehicle Ownership

Non-vehicle Owner
Vehicle Owner

Race and Ethnicity

Race and Ethnicity

Age

Seniors

Working Age Adults

Youth

Strategy Class

- Technology

Strategy Types

- Civic Engagement
- Promotional

Description

Instant polling technology offers agencies the ability to collect public opinion information at public meetings and events or through the internet. Participants are presented with a ballot or list of items to consider and are asked to record their preference either with a hand held device, a telephone, or through the internet. The results are anonymous, and can be displayed instantaneously at the event or on a website. Below are the various types of instant polling options that agencies can utilize: ¹

- **Keypad polling:** Participants are given a small handheld keypad device and asked to submit their preference from a list of choices. The responses are sent to a central receiver. However, the choices are limited to numeric responses.
- **Cell phone polling:** The public are encouraged to submit their preferences from a list of options using their cell phones, either by texting or using a special application. This method allows people to participate, regardless of distance. Cell phone polling also allows for responses to be submitted numerically, in text, or in audio.
- **Web-based polling:** Participants can use computers, smart phones, and mobile devices to register choices over the Internet. Like cell phone polling, a variety of response types can be accepted. Examples include web polling and surveys.

Special Uses

Instant polling technology can be used to:

- Obtain immediate feedback
- Engage the public at meetings and events
- Allow people the opportunity to participate in and voice their opinions in private (without fear or the "bully effect")

When to Use

Instant voting techniques can be used at public meetings, charrettes, visioning sessions, and any other type of event where public feedback is important. Such technology helps to ensure that all participants have an opportunity to express their sentiments without the need to speak in public. Instant voting technology also allows agencies to quickly gauge public preferences regarding a project or plan through online voting technology." ²

Cost

*** * * High (\$10000 to \$50000)**

The cost of instant polling systems can be high, depending on the complexity of the program and if outside consultants are used to implement the system. Expenses include administration, equipment, software, and staff time. Key pad polling represents the most expensive option. Purchasing or leasing the wireless instant polling devices can cost several hundreds to thousands of dollars. The cost depends on the number of units used, the duration of the program, and the complexity of the voting format. Cell phone and internet polling offer a less expensive and cost effective option. Costs include software, programming expenses, and staff time to oversee the system.⁵

Low (up to \$999)

*

Moderate (\$1,000 to \$9,999)

**

Disclaimer: The cost estimates provided are intended to be a guide. Project costs will vary depending on the size and nature

High (\$10,000 to \$50,000)	***	of the project.
Very High (Above \$50,000)	****	

Time

* 1 to 3 months

Instant polling can be implemented in a relatively short amount of time. The most time consuming aspects of using such technology include set up and any special programming that may be required. Staff time is also needed to oversee the polling procedures, assist participants with the process, present the findings, and analyze results.

1 to 3 months	*	<i>Disclaimer:</i> The time estimates are approximations. The duration of a project may vary depending on various factors, including size and budget.
6 months to a year	**	
Multiyear	***	

Implementation Guidelines and Suggestions

The following serve as recommended guidelines and suggestions for implementing instant polling technology: ³

- **Determine how instant polling will be applied.** Instant polling technology can be used at any meeting or event where the public is asked to rate, rank, or select options under consideration. This can include town hall meetings, charrettes, brainstorming sessions, visioning meetings, and focus groups. Agencies can also conduct online surveys, online forums and virtual town hall meetings to obtain public feedback instantaneously.
- **Decide what technology will be utilized.** The funding resources that are available will help to determine what technology will be most feasible. Key pad polling devices should be used at meetings and events in order to give all participants who are present the opportunity to cast their selection; however, purchasing or leasing these devices can be expensive. The advantage of using key pads is that the results can be tabulated and displayed instantly, but the cost must be considered since it is possible to achieve similar results using low-tech methods (i.e. paper ballots). Furthermore, key pads can only be used by the participants at the event. Cell phone and internet voting methods allow for a broader reach beyond the event and are more cost effective. However, participation is limited to people who have access to such technology.
- **Determine how the polling options or questions will be presented.** The polling options or questions must be easy to understand and quantifiable. This will help to facilitate tabulation and analysis. For example, participants can provide a "yes" or "no" response, or select from a numbered list of options. It is also possible to use a preference scale (i.e. high to low, like to dislike, etc.) Open ended questions should be avoided if using key pads, since responses can only be registered in numbers. However, it is possible to use open ended responses on cell phones and internet devices. This allows agencies to display public sentiment; however, such responses are difficult to categorize and tabulate quickly.
- **Ensure protection from fraud, double counting, and hacking.** Measures should be taken to ensure that the system is kept secure from hackers and others who want to influence the polling mechanisms. Special software can be used to protect the system and prevent people from polling multiple times or changing results. (For information on special software and applications, see the "For Further Information" section.)
- **Analyze the polling results.** Special software can be used to tally and analyze the polling results. When analyzing the data, however, it is important to remember that the results of instant polling techniques only represent the opinions and sentiments of the participants at a given point in time. The results should not be viewed as a representative sample of the population. Nevertheless, instant polling techniques provide a useful tool in gauging public sentiment. (For information on special software and applications, see the "For Further Information" section.)

Recommended Target Demographics

Instant polling technology can be used among all demographic groups to help understand specific preferences and opinions. "However, care must be taken to understand the nature of the [polling] group...and inferences drawn about ...general populations or groups." ⁴ In addition, persons who are not technically savvy may encounter difficulty participating, and accessibility will be an issue for people who do not have access to cell phones or the internet.

Lessons Learned/Challenges

Below are key points to keep in mind when implementing instant polling technology: ⁶

- **Test the system to make sure that there are no technical bugs.**
- **Provide technical support for persons who may have problems understanding the system or who may have limited technological skills.**
- **Use sample questions to warm up participants.** This will help the audience to become familiar with how the system works.
- **Questions and polling options should be carefully reviewed and tested to ensure they are easy to understand.**

Case Studies

The Miami-Dade County MPO used key polling devices during public meetings during the development of the 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). The devices enabled the agency to obtain valuable public feedback during the public involvement process. (<http://www.miamidade2035transportationplan.com/>).⁷

The City of Portland used key pad polling devices to allow the public to help select the issues to be included in Phase II of the Portland Plan. The handheld polling devices were also used to gather demographic information about participants (<http://eastpdxnews.com/general-news-features/phase-ii-of-%E2%80%98portland-plan%E2%80%99-gets-input-from-outer-east-portland/>).⁸

City of Bellevue, used hand-held interactive polling devices to obtain information regarding the usefulness of the city's performance measures. The devices were used at a citizen forum and the feedback that was received was used to help assess the existing Performance Measures (http://www.ci.bellevue.wa.us/pdf/Finance/Citizen_Forum_Report.pdf).⁹

The Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC) conducted online surveys, used electronic polling technology, and held a web-based regional town hall to obtain resident feedback regarding the area's a long-term planning effort. (<http://www.spcregion.org/proj/award.shtml>).¹⁰

For Further Information

The following websites provide additional information regarding instant polling technology and vendors that provide the technology:¹¹

- America Speaks: holds town hall meetings that allow the public to participate through the internet (<http://americaspeaks.org/>)
- Poll Everywhere: provides cell phone or internet voting applications(www.polleverywhere.com)
- TurningPoint: keypad polling provider (<http://www.turningtechnologies.com>)
- Survey Monkey: provides free and paid online survey applications (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>)
- IdeaScale: provides online crowd sourcing and ranking ideas (<http://www.ideascale.com>)

Sources

1 "Community Planning Methods: E-Voting," CommunityPlanning.net, 25 January 2012, (<http://www.communityplanning.net/methods/e-voting.php>).

2 U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), "USDOT FHWA/FTA Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making: Handheld Instant Voting," August 2002, 29, FHWA, 17 January 2012 (<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/contents.htm>).

3 FHWA, "USDOT FHWA/FTA Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making: Handheld Instant Voting."

4 FHWA, "USDOT FHWA/FTA Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making: Handheld Instant Voting."

5 "Community Planning Methods: E-Voting," CommunityPlanning.net.

6 "Community Planning Methods: E-Voting," CommunityPlanning.net.

7 Gannett Flemming, "Miami-Dade Long Range Transportation Plan to the Year 2035: Public Participation Plan," Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Miami Urbanized Area, 5 February 2012, (<http://www.miamidade2035transportationplan.com/>).

8 "Phase II of 'Portland Plan' Gets Input From Outer East Portland," East Portland News, 20 January 2012, (<http://eastpdxnews.com/general-news-features/phase-ii-of-%E2%80%98portland-plan%E2%80%99-gets-input-from-outer-east-portland/>).

9 City of Bellevue, "City Performance Measures: Citizen Forum On "Vital Signs,"" 24 May 2005, City of Bellevue, 20 January 2012, (http://www.ci.bellevue.wa.us/pdf/Finance/Citizen_Forum_Report.pdf).

10 "Project Region Recognized as a Regional Visioning Best Practice with Four National Excellence Awards," 1 August 1, 2008, Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC), 21 January 2012, (<http://www.spcregion.org/proj/award.shtml>).

11 "Community Planning Methods: E-Voting," CommunityPlanning.net.