

# Crowdsourcing Tools for Public Participation in Planning

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## Definitions

**Participation** in planning has many purposes: (1) share decision-making power, (2) obtain views, ideas, and local knowledge for plans, (3) build support for specific plans.

**Crowdsourcing** is the use of new Internet tools to organizing people working on specific tasks. Urban planners have used crowdsourcing to collect input for participation, designs for bus stops and transit stations, and even to write plans.

**Open Government** refers to a range of programs to use Internet technologies to expand transparency, participation, and collaboration in government.

## Idea & Feedback Tools

These tools allow participants to post a short response to a question or prompt, as well as vote on the existing responses. They can be used as a standalone project, or integrated into a broader participation process. They work best with clear, specific questions where citizen input is desired. The potential drawbacks are obtaining feedback from beyond the target community, or receiving spam or offensive responses. However, responses can be moderated and the number and type of participants is influenced by how they are promoted.

## Participation Planning

The first step in any public participation exercise is to determine the goals and objectives of the exercise. The goals in turn determine the design of the participation process, and what combination of traditional (offline) and online components are needed. These could include public meetings, workshops, newsletters, surveys, social media outreach, and websites.

Tool	Cost	Description	Example
IdeaScale <a href="http://www.ideascale.com">www.ideascale.com</a>	Free for one topic, \$15-100 a month for additional features. Special rates for civic and government users.	Users vote up or down on submissions.	OpenAustin ( <a href="http://openaustin.ideascale.com/">http://openaustin.ideascale.com/</a> ) – Partnership to generate ideas for improving the city’s website.
UserVoice <a href="http://www.uservoice.com">www.uservoice.com</a>	Free for one topic, \$14-100 a month for additional features.	Users allocate their limited number of votes to the existing ideas.	Vancouver Green City ( <a href="http://vancouver.uservoice.com">http://vancouver.uservoice.com</a> ) – Discussion of strategies for urban sustainability.
MindMixer <a href="http://www.mindmixer.com">www.mindmixer.com</a>	Consulting model, intended for civic and government projects.	Greater focus on context, usually includes introductory videos from project leaders.	Barnstable iForum ( <a href="http://www.barnstableforum.com/">http://www.barnstableforum.com/</a> uses MindMixer tool) – Civic engagement website for Barnstable, Mass.

## Mapping Tools

This tool allows visitors to put a pin on a map, and provide a short “report.” It can be customized to collect a wide range of information, and has been used for a range of goals.

Tool	Cost	Description	Example
Crowdmap/Ushahidi <a href="http://www.crowdmap.com">www.crowdmap.com</a>	Free	Post pins on maps with reports.	Haiti Ushahidi ( <a href="http://haiti.ushahidi.com/">http://haiti.ushahidi.com/</a> ) – Aggregate reports after the Haiti earthquake

## Other Projects

- **NextStopDesign.com** – Project where users submitted designs for a bus stop, which were discussed and voted on by users.
- **InteractiveSomerville.org** – A website to encourage participation in planning for the Green Line extension to Somerville.
- **Future Melbourne Wiki** (<http://www.futuremelbourne.com.au>) - A project to use a wiki to write a city plan for Melbourne, Australia.

For information about additional tools, see <http://web.mit.edu/rgoodspe/www/tools.shtml>