Leveraging Technology to Enhance Community Engagement in West Sacramento

Mayors Innovation Project
Washington, D.C.
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The Public Meeting
Some Problems with Public Meetings

- Resources/logistics
- Resident convenience
- Equity
- Timing/relevance
- Strategic behavior
- Social pressure
Online Engagement

- Cheaper
- More convenient for residents
- Reach more residents quickly
- Still subject to:
  - Equity issues (e.g. Internet access)
  - Cognitive bias
Revealed vs. Expressed Preferences

• Meetings: expressed preferences

• Social media reveals residents’ preferences

• Advantages of revealed preferences:
  o Convenient, low-cost
  o Minimizes strategic behavior
  o Minimizes cognitive bias

• Challenge: how to collect and analyze social media artifacts
Social Media Listening Software

- ZenCity platform uses AI to categorize + assign sentiment to public posts
- Sources include:
  - Public FB posts
  - Tweets from specified accounts and hashtags
  - Comments on City’s CRM portal
  - NextDoor (responses to City posts only)
- All material was intended to be public
- No spying, no tracking of individual residents’ posts
Uses

- Cross-check our perception of public sentiment
- Measure performance of communications efforts
- Measure qualitative outcomes of fielded projects
- City Council receives monthly summary
Interaction Count, Map, Sentiment Trend

- **Interaction Count**
  - Social Media Interactions: 4,726
  - City Hotline Interactions: 14
  - Websites Interactions: 1

- **Sentiment Trend**

*Note: The sentiment trend chart is not fully visible in the image.*
Discourse Timeline
Next Steps for City of West Sacramento

- “Tinder for Cities” app: low-stakes engagement
- Augmented Reality engagement tool
- Improve in-person engagement through training
Take-Aways

• In-person engagement is still important, but is a means to an end

• The goal of engagement should not be more meetings

• The goal should be to understand community needs so well that fewer meetings are required in order to deliver results that delight residents

• Leveraging revealed preferences can help achieve that outcome
The End

For a more about the philosophy that informs key elements of our community engagement work, see West Sacramento Mayor Christopher Cabaldon’s 2013 Tedx Talk, “A Hard Reboot of Democracy in the City,” available on YouTube.