

# CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT CHARRETTE

On July 25, 2013, Provo residents, employees, and other stakeholders gathered together to discuss citizen engagement. Spilt into three groups, participants defined and discussed citizen engagement, successfully engaging residents, strengths and weakness of Provo's citizen engagement, technology and tools available, and engaging the unengaged. The following are the notes taken during the event.

*Notes*

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## What is Citizen Engagement?

### Table 1 established that citizen engagement occurs when . . .

- Citizens are connected and involved and know how to contact city officials
- There is clear, open communication between citizens and city officials
- Officials create opportunities for an open dialogue with citizens
- Citizens feel invested in city decisions and feel that they are stakeholders in city business.

There was a good bit of discussion around the idea of equity and fairness in civic dialogue, with one participant expressing concern that 90 seconds at a city council meeting is not enough time for citizens to be able to express their opinions to the city council. Another member of our group suggested that public meetings are not necessarily the best place to give the city council feedback or suggestions, and thought that having a clearly stated policy that encouraged citizens to talk to the city council members before public meetings would help all parties.

### Table 2 explained that citizen engagement is when government . . .

- simplifies government speak - use terminology that the average resident can understand. Break down the facts and provide all of the information.
- is accessible – provide information online, city website, city newsletter, 311, etc...
- understands the ramifications – outcomes of decisions
- balances with residents and understand that it is a two way street. The government needs to do all that they can to give the information and then the residents need to take an interest.
- is proactive – continuously updating information and staying up to date on information that is going to impact residents.
- understands that education is the key – the more the residents are educated, the more they will understand the process and final product of a decision.
- has multiple avenues to be informed – take advantage of all outlets: social media, phone, email, newsletters, posters/fliers, TV, etc...
- builds a record of trust – track the history of decisions (What was the pathway that led to the decisions?)
- gets the issues out and understood before the impact

There was a discussion that in order to avoid public clamor, the government needs to engage citizens before it is affecting them personally. That government and residents need to understand the ramifications or outcomes of decisions being made. There were also comments that residents need to understand the impact of their involvement. They need to have personal accountability and do their part in engaging the city. There needs to be a mutual involvement from both the City and residents.

### Table 3 explained that citizen engagement is . . .

- partnerships within the community
- A mindset. This will require a change for residents. They will need to change how they view their ability to interact with the city.
- the knowledge of available assets
- the knowledge of the system
- not only getting people talking both downwards and upwards in a community but also horizontally across the board.
- utilizing assets
- making people feel welcome and encouraged

- an Asset Based Community Development Culture
- residents willing to participate and knowledgeable about events
- a dialogue before a decision is made.

It was discussed that citizen engagement is more than just informing citizens. It is a dialogue of what is happening during each step of the process. Many people also voiced their opinions that citizen engagement should not just be the role of the City or the Mayor’s Office. Residents need to take a role in creating citizen engagement. It was also expressed by one member that a private entity should be responsible for providing central database for all events in the community. As a whole, the group established that citizen engagement is when all residents, employees, and elected officials work together to best utilize the assets in the community.

## What is successful citizen engagement?

**Table 1** described that in a city with effective, successful citizen engagement . . .

- the City uses a variety of tools to connect with residents in the ways that they want to be connected; one table member expressed extreme skepticism about using social media and online tools to connect with residents, but a BYU student on the panel suggested that that was the best way to connect with his demographic.
- citizens vote.
- citizens understand and utilize the appropriate avenues for solving their specific problems (i.e. citizens talk to appropriate department heads about their grievances rather than taking them right to the city council).
- citizens are knowledgeable and informed about city projects, future plans, and potential challenges.

**Table 2** explained that successful citizen engagement is . . .

- having new residents get involved
- community to community engagement – connecting neighborhood relationships
- the ability to access information from both sides, central location, unbiased at a City and Neighborhood level
- providing access to all citizens
- employees who can speak multiple languages to help get the information out to the residents
- a trusting relationship with the residents and government
- allowing citizens opportunities where they have a voice and feel like they can make a difference.

**Table 3** established that successful citizen engagement is . . .

- being Informed
- being Transparent
- knowledge on how to have a dialogue
  - getting people involved early in the discussion
  - having multiple avenues to provide information and have a discussion
  - having the right people part of the decision
- the opportunity to voice opinion
- having training so that people know how to be involved

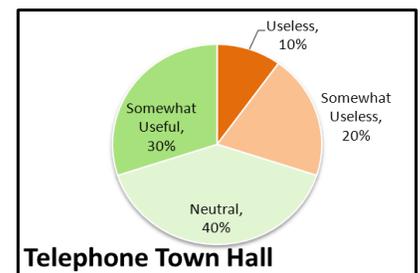
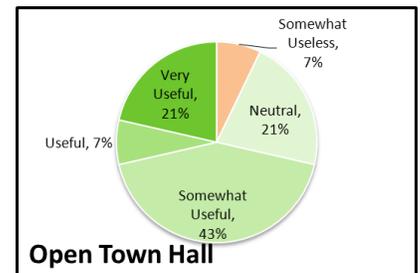
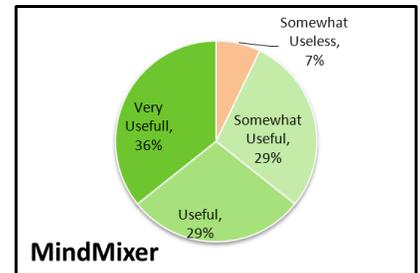
- getting the information to the people who need it
- having information easy to get and being able to easily express opinions and give feedback
- hard to measure
- centralized but available in more than one place so people can find just the information they need.

## What type of engagement tools should Provo use?

Before the charrette, participants were shown three citizen engagement tools cities across the nation are using. At the charrette, participants were shown one additional mapping tool. Participants look at and discussed websites for Mind Mixer, Open Town Hall, Telephone Town Hall and also a mapping tool. The website links for these products are found below. To the right you find how participants rated the usefulness of Mind Mixer, Open Town Hall, and Telephone Town Hall to Provo residents. As shown by the pie charts, Mind Mixer had the highest ratings with 65 percent of participants thinking that Mind Mixer would be useful or very useful.

### Engagement Tools Website Links

- Mind Mixer:
  - Website: <http://www.mindmixer.com>
  - Example City: <http://www.myplanphx.com>
- Open Town Hall:
  - Product Website: <http://www.peakdemocracy.com>
  - Example City: <http://www.slcgov.com/opencityhall>
- Telephone Town Hall:
  - Website: <http://telephonetownhallmeeting.com/>
  - Examples: <http://telephonetownhallmeeting.com/municipalities/>
- City Mapping Tool:
  - Website: <http://localgovtemplates2.esri.com/publicinfocenter/default.htm>



### Table 1 made the following comments about the engagement tools

- Table 1 was pretty enthusiastic about tool-based engagement strategies, though everyone agreed that telephone town hall wasn't right for Provo. In discussing some of the other tools, they agreed that different tools were useful for different goals.
- Table 1 liked that Open Town Hall allows for civil dialogue, and thought that it's possible that there are people who might contribute in that forum that wouldn't come to a city council meeting. There was, however, a general consensus that this forum wouldn't engage young people, those of a lower SES, or people who aren't generally active in city politics. They felt like this made it easier to contribute to city council meetings, but figured it would probably only appeal to the people who are already engaged in the process.
- Table 1 really liked Mind Mixer; they felt it looked friendly, interactive, and would be more engaging and interesting to young people, and might provide a nice gateway into more traditional

engagement strategies. They loved that participation might be incentivized, and felt like the ease of use appealed to a “slacktivist” generation. There were concerns raised about Mind Mixer’s potential for hateful comments and flame wars, for its potential security risks, and the potential cost of implementing such a tool.

- There was also a plea for tools already in use to contain more useful information; there was specific mention of the city newsletter sent out with utility bills, and a desire for it to contain more information.

**Table 2 made the following comments about the engagement tools**

- See a need for all tools shown in the slide
- Adopting a user interface for residents. Needs to be modern and easy to use
- Social Share capabilities on website and all postings to help spread the word about information
- Provide training videos and tutorials
- Combine example tools into Provo’s own application and Have Google make the application ☺
- Update current maps with email and hyperlinks: Council and neighborhood chair contacts, etc...
- Market and educate people about where to find the information online
- Incentivize residents to be engaged. Coupons in newsletter, etc...
- Find out how people want to be notified and customize your advertising to their needs

**Table 3 made the following comments about the engagement tools**

- Have a front door approach. If residents or other community members get started using apps or other tools they are more likely to become engaged in something else.
  - Many people come to the website to find information on one thing but as they use the website they may get more engaged in other topics.
- There is a strong need for visual forms of communication. Everyone expressed a strong desire for more map type applications.
- Map apps and other visual tools are great for people to find out information about a specific area. Most people expressed much need for centralized maps
- There was a strong interest in having an online dialogue format to express opinions.
- It was also suggested that citizens create their own tool to keep updated with city events.

**How do we engage the unengaged?**

**Table 1 discussed how to engage the unengaged focusing on the following points:**

- The following groups were listed as potentially unengaged:
  - Students
  - Parents with young children
  - People who live in Provo but work in another city
  - Those with low income or low education levels
  - Minorities
  - People who are very busy
- One overarching theme was the idea that the most effective way to engage citizens is to keep them in the loop about issues that are important to them.
- Specifically targeting groups that are stakeholders in city decisions was seen as the most effective means of engaging the unengaged.

- The BYU student at the table mentioned that during his campaign for student body president, he made predatory towing an issue and students were quite vocal and involved in the conversation surrounding Provo's towing practices.
- One table member mentioned having something like Google translate embedded in the webpage somewhere so that foreign language speakers could still receive important information.

## How can we better engage residents through technology?

**Table 2** discussed how to engage residents through technology.

- They talked about the way people want to get engaged:
  - Text updates – keep information quick and simple and link to more information
  - Emergency updates
  - We are in transition right now as the younger generation continues to get older. The need for technology is going to keep growing.
  - Priority of marketing survey – get feedback from residents
- They discussed the possible tools people would want to use in getting engaged. Created an example of a customized app for residents when the log into the city website.
- They discussed how to make these tools more available to all residents
  - Implement a City-wide marketing campaign
  - Neighborhood education classes
  - Incentivize residents if they sign up for email lists, social media platforms, etc...
  - Pay utilities online through your individual/customized portal

## How can we engage all generations?

**Table 3** discussed how to better engage all generations establishing the following:

- It needs to be understood that different people have different needs and interests.
  - There will not be a one size fit solution for all people
- There is also a different level of engagement from different people and this level will be different for different topics. Not everyone would be interested in the planning of roads but the information needs to be available for those that are interested.
- It is important to have things centralized so that people can be connected to other information. This leads back to the front door approach.
- Neighborhood chair should be used as one tool rather than the only means of information
- People need to know how to use city resources and how to contribute
- Have a way to connect people.
- All groups define themselves. Rather than try and determine which groups need to be connected people can define their own group.
- The city/community needs to share avenues perhaps share #tags. This will allow people to find all the information on one subject in one place
- The city needs to maintain its own information.
- The City needs to have more tools for online dialog and mapping
- Citizens will be able to create their own tools if they have their own information.
- Tools available that are useful

# Citizen Engagement Charrette

- Twitter
- Email
- Personal contact
- Telephone contact
- Talk to neighbors
- Attend online meetings
- In order to engage more residents the city needs to have
  - Multiple ways of sharing and receiving information
  - Simple tools that are easy to use
  - Provide training
  - Use neighborhood chairs to make sure people have an avenue for information
  - Perhaps have an exception for public signs but taking in to account that signs are being ignored
  - Create a citizen engagement campaign
  - Connect groups
  - Educate using clubs and others to get people to understand the importance of being connected. This could be college students teaching the older generation how to use online sources
  - Take advantages of other resources to get people engaged.
- It is too expensive to have to print and deliver city information. The city could charge the cost of postage to deliver a city newsletter for those who cannot access it online.
- It is less expensive and easier to get everyone working online. This will require education and neighbors helping the older generation.
- It is important to remember that as important as the delivery is it is just as important to have the content.
- It was suggest that an independent group needs provide a place for residents to receive all of the information about the community in one place. The city should not be in charge of this.

## How can we engage with the Website?

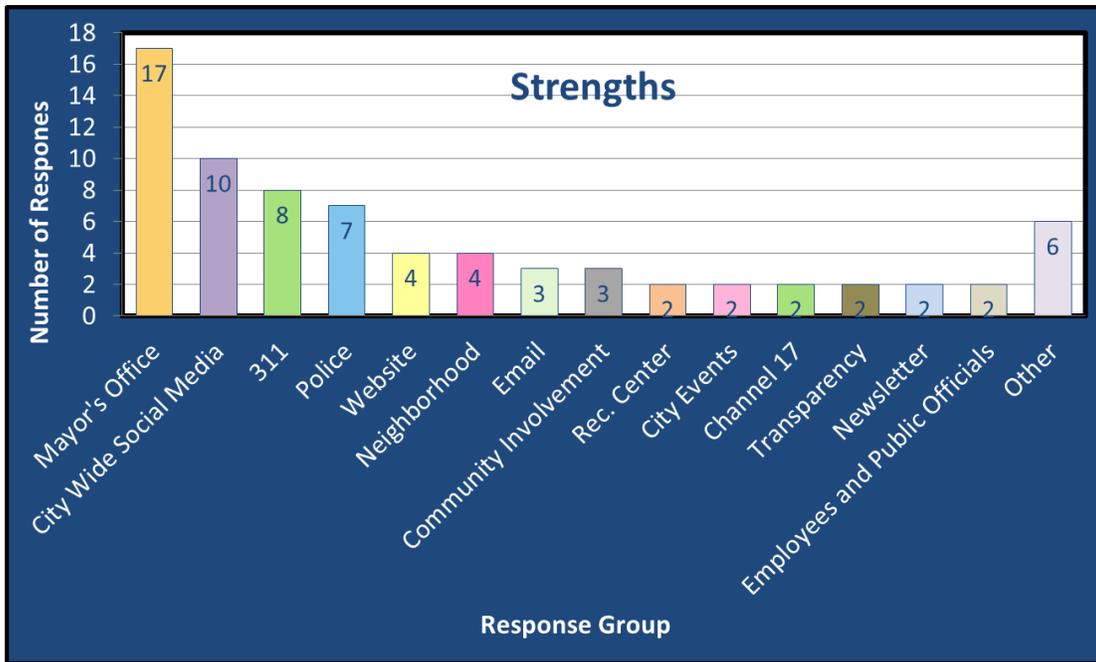
**Table 1** discussed the Provo City Website and established the following:

- The website in its current form is difficult to navigate and feels like an overload of information without clear indicators of where to go to solve a problem.
- The current version of the interactive map uses Flash rather than HTML5, which means that it cannot be viewed on Apple devices.
- The most important things for the website:
  - City events
  - Meeting agendas and staff reports
  - Current issues facing Provo Library
  - A list of departments and clear indications of how to contact them
  - Simplified, easy to understand budgets.

## What are the Strengths and Weaknesses of Provo’s Citizen Engagement?

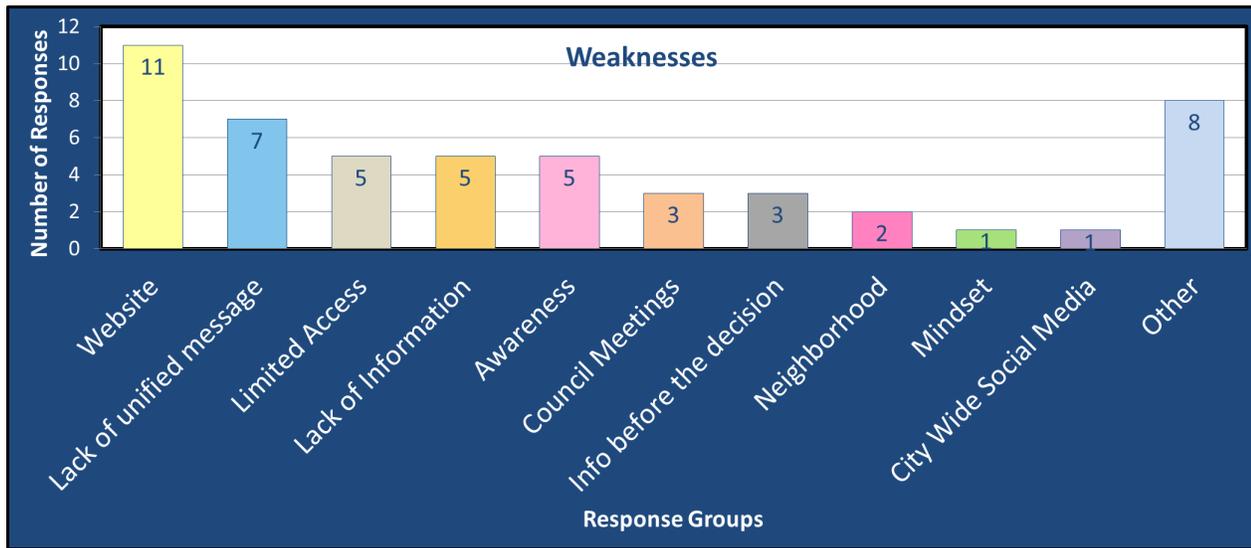
During the charrette, each participant was asked to write down five strengths and weaknesses. I color-coated responses into categories and created a bar graph for each category. Below you will the graph visually summarizing data and a table listing all 74 strengths listed. On the next page you will similarly find a table and graph for the 51 listed weaknesses. For both strengths and weaknesses to conserve space, I combined responses that were similarly in wording.

## Strengths of Provo's Citizen Engagement



Strengths			
1	Awesome Mayor's Office	50	Neighborhood Chair Program
2-16	Mayor's Blog and Twitter	51-52	City emails (but not everyone subscribes)
17	Mayor Curtis is very accessible	53	Emails from Neighborhood Chairs
18-23	Facebook- Multi Department Posts/ Networking	54	Community oriented policing helps connect people
24-26	Twitter	55	If you want to volunteer they have a place for you
27	Continuing revamp of online presence	56	Community involvement
28-34	311 Customer Services Center, one stop shop	57-58	New Recreation Center
35	311 is a marvelous tool for a first contact	59	Provo Marathon
36	Police Departments caring and protective nature	60	City Activities
37	Police Departments Citizen Academy	61-62	Channel 17, Televised Meetings
38-39	Police Department citizen volunteer programs	63	Transparency
40-41	Police Department Engagement	64	Commitment to transparency form highest levels
42	Police Department in the community	65-66	Good Info in City's newsletter
43	Website for BYU new citizens section	67	City employees work well with the public
44	Website updates on current information	68	Present council members are very dedicated
45	Staff reports on website	69	Better outline documents than past
46	Planning Commission Website	70	Working with press
47	Neighborhood Meeting Signs	71	Interactive map on Provo.org
48	Block parties	72	Public notice signs on properties
49	Neighborhood program can involve more residents	73	Our Provo Facebook Page
74	Engagement		

## Weaknesses of Provo's Citizen Engagement



Weaknesses	
1	Information on all issues affecting the city need to be available via internet/email to all citizens
2	Search does not always bring up the relevant results
3-4	Website can be confusing to navigate
5	Website needs a page explaining how citizens can be involved an also share the resources available
6	Website has inaccurate information
7	Sometimes the website isn't well organized
8-9	Website
10	Web access to public hearing notices
11	Needs a improved/useful webpage
27	Fragmentation of efforts to engage public
28	Somewhat disparate approaches to engaging resident
29	Shared common vision
30	No coordination of information
31	Not all departments share same enthusiasm for communication
32	Too may pieces of informatory
33	Departments struggle with communication
15	Not everyone can access online
16	Language exclusion
17	No venues of discussion or info for limited English speakers
18	Public process does not engage all economic situations
19	Lack of internet connectivity for some
34	Lack of commercial development information
35	Lack of residential development information
36	Communication after local problem (city pipe backups etc.)
37	Lack of Construction info
38	Utility plans long term
39	Lack of awareness among students about how to get engaged
40	Contact with new residents many don't know how to access information
41	Lack of insolvent of youth (8-12th grade)
42	How does a citizen begin engagement need a cohesive front end
43	Youth not engaged
20	Someone at council meetings needs to summarize issues that have already been discussed elsewhere
21	Failure by council to open meetings
22	Failure by council to open meetings
23	Lack of discussion on issues before brought to city's council
24-25	Pre-decision conversations need to be made public
12	Need more neighborhood signs
13	Neighborhood chair design
26	Culture/tradition of lack of responsiveness
14	General use of social media
44	Preservation
45	Blighted areas
46	Absentee landlords
47	The "rules" are cumbersome
48	It's not as easy to contact my council member as the mayor
49	Money is spent on things I don't think are important
50	Ineffective use of boards and commissions
51	Council abdicating public involvement responsibility to the Mayor

## What did the pre-charrette survey tell the City?

Before attending the charrette, participants were asked to take a survey. This survey was used as a tool to ask a variety of questions on citizen engagement. There were 19 responses. The following information was gained about the participants of the charrette.

- Participants prefer to receive all city information through the website, social media, or email.
- The majority of participants are happy with Provo City's current engagement efforts
- Majority of participants would prefer an online discussion board or social media to express their opinions on city issues rather than attend a city council meeting
- Most participants (about 83.3%) preferred Mind Mixer to Open Town Hall, and Telephone Town Hall

## What did participants learn from the Citizen Engagement Charrette?

After the charrette, participants were asked to respond to questions regarding their participation with the charrette. Most opinions and thoughts expressed were similarly to the thoughts expressed during the charrette. The following are the responses to what people learned from participating in the charrette.

- Mostly I learned that there are a lot of different areas that people want information from. The solution needs to include a lot of different things.
- I learned that you can learn a lot from open discussion. I was also reminded of the importance of widening my viewpoint and really listening to the viewpoints of others. I also learned that what I feel is the obvious answer is not always the best answer. In other words one should be careful about jumping to conclusions.
- It was good hearing about different ways people interact with technology or don't. Hearing about the cities concerns and goals
- That I have been trying to define the groups that need to engage, and they need to define themselves.
- I am impressed with the fiscal situation Provo is in.
- I was happy to learn that there are people committed to creating and maintaining a quality community. There is a lot of work to do for our city to remain vibrant and relevant, and I'm impressed by Provo's proactive and inclusive approach.
- It reaffirmed that there is no "right" way to engage in community engagement. Effective engagement requires many types of community contact, from online to personal visits. It was good for me to see various viewpoints. It is easy to get stuck in one mindset.
- A lot of people are interested in the project and can contribute solutions and improvements.
- Wayne knows a lot of stuff!