

Turning the Ship

Create a Culture of Digital Engagement in Fort Wayne



with the City of Fort Wayne
& Social Pinpoint

Wednesday, April 23, 2025
IAP2 Midwest Conference
Omaha, NE



Speakers



Dan Baisden

Director of Neighborhoods
Department of Neighborhoods
City of Fort Wayne, IN



Kevin Cobb

Engage Fort Wayne Coordinator
Department of Neighborhoods
City of Fort Wayne, IN



Sophia Robison

Practice Lead
North America
Social Pinpoint

Agenda

10-10:40 → Presentation

10:40-11 → Q&A

11-11:15 → Breakouts



Pre-Engage Fort Wayne



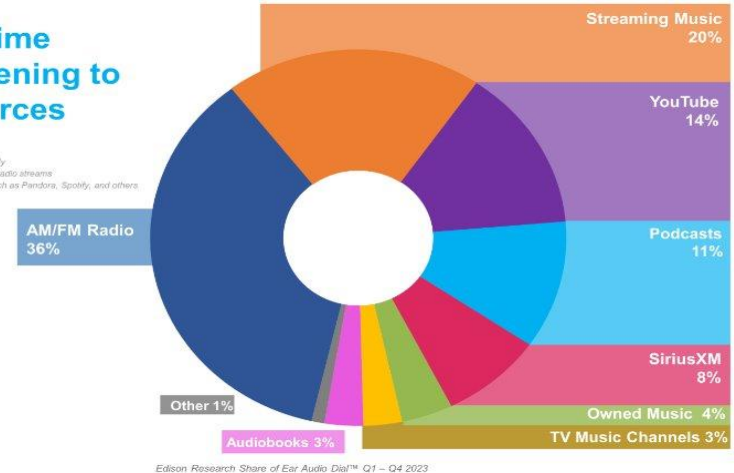
What did engagement look like?

- Mostly traditional methods (i.e. stickers & dots, static press releases, direct mail, etc.)
- If the project moved forward, there would be a second press release and a ribbon cutting with the Mayor
- To give feedback, residents required to arrive in-person and share input on a board that would disappear; very little follow-up

Share of Time Spent Listening to Audio Sources

U.S. Population 13+

YouTube for music and music videos only
AM/FM Radio includes over the air and radio streams
Streaming Music includes pure plays such as Pandora, Spotify, and others.



What necessitated a change?

- Often the fastest growing City in the Great Lakes Region of the past decade, and we weren't keeping up with modern communication practices to shape City growth
- Forms of modern communication consumption are rapidly changing (what is the shelf-life of your comms and how is it different than 10 years ago?)

What can digital/hybrid engagement add?

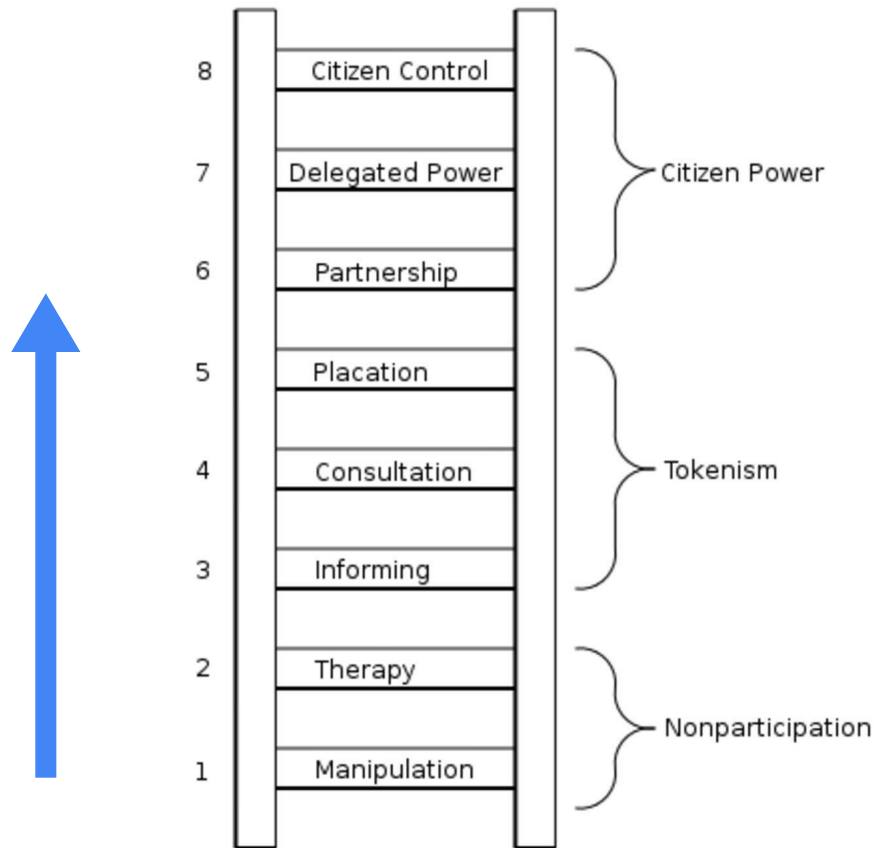
Say “yes, and...” to church basements with cold coffee and stale cookies.

Digital engagement:

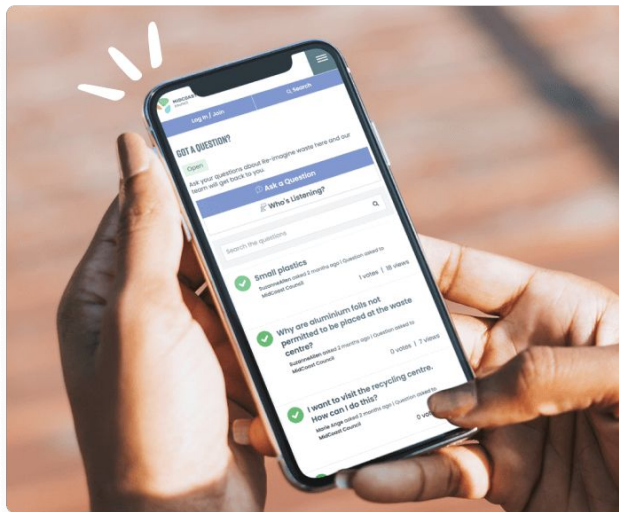
- Allows the public to obtain information that is meaningful to them, when it is of interest to them
- Moves dialogue further up Arnstein's Ladder
- Ensure that we're hearing from more than the “traditional few”

Once we've opened the door to asynchronous participation, we can re-think:

- What does representativeness look like?
- How do we measure equitable participation?
- Do we value in-person and online participation equally?



What is a digital engagement platform?



A single source of truth for how to participate.

- Makes it easier to find a public meeting or engagement opportunity
- The public doesn't need to know the name of the department doing the work
- Opportunities to participate in five to fifty minutes
- Provides equivalent-valued spaces for parallel participation events
- Understand passive engagers – those who don't leave comments but still consumed information and left more educated
- Increase equitable access to participation: lower time commitment, friendly to a variety of learning styles and abilities, increased language access, reduces power dynamics often at play in-person
- **Always** paired with in-person opportunities to meet the broadest cross-section of the community

How do we define “digital” engagement?

In-Person	Digital	Hybrid	Asynchronous	Continuous
Traditionally dominated by public hearing style formats, organizations are increasingly using breakout rooms, sticky notes, dot exercises, and storytelling, etc. to make meetings more interactive, engaging and trust-building.	Digital meetings take place over a video interface and generally copy the format of an in-person meeting. Some digital meetings will use webinar features to create a more controlled environment, or breakout rooms to allow for smaller discussion groups.	Leverage in-person and online engagement opportunities. This usually involves hosting an in-person meeting and allowing participants to join the in-person meeting from an online video interface as well. Sometimes, a separate in-person and online meeting will be held.	Doesn't require attendance at a specific meeting time. Using digital engagement tools, like Social Pinpoint, you pose questions, create conversation spaces, and allow community members to interact on their own time, with each other from wherever they can best access the info and questions.	Using all of the previous engagement mediums, input can happen over an extended period of time. Continuous engagement also opens the opportunity for non-project-based engagement.

What is Engage Fort Wayne?

Engage provides an opportunity to expand our outreach and engagement toolbox. It allows us to use more rungs of Arnstein's Ladder.

Tell a bigger picture instead of only sharing bite-sized press releases and unrelated, periodic social media posts

- Build and rebuild trust one project at a time by crafting honest and transparent decision-making processes
- Remove barriers to understanding government – multiple departments engage in the same space (Community Development, Public Works, City Council, Parks & Rec; soon to add Police, Fire and others!)

I'm looking for projects about

All categories in All places

or

Search for a specific project...

Search

OPEN

Projects currently accepting community input



Last updated: 15 Apr, 2025

**Frances
Slocum**



Last updated: 14 Apr, 2025

**Lawton Park
Trestle Bridge**



Last updated: 11 Apr, 2025

**Cooper
Community**



Last updated: 11 Apr, 2025

**Bike Rack
Program**

The storytelling challenge:

How do we make a mundane road project into something that actually impacts people on the street? How do we turn a sidewalk project into something that kids (and their parents) are excited about?



kmbrooks00 OP • 14h ago

Are you aware of the work that has already been done? Did you provide your input during the open houses for the Historic Northeast Plan? Do you attend the Northside Neighborhood meetings?

<https://engage.cityoffortwayne.org/historic-northeast-2035-implementation>

You may want to work with your neighborhood association to apply for this:

<https://engage.cityoffortwayne.org/connected-neighborhoods-initiative>

There are also smaller grants.

Here are other older areas that are being worked on:

<https://engage.cityoffortwayne.org/packard-2030/packard-2030-implementation>

<https://engage.cityoffortwayne.org/northwest-2035-neighborhood-plan>



r/fortwayne • 1 mo. ago
mahlerlieber Top 1% Commenter

What the heck is happening at Bluffton and Broadway?

Probably the better question is how long is that going to take?



weisblattsnut • 1mo ago

A new portal to Waynedale is being constructed.



36



Reply



Award



Share



...



kmbrooks00 • 1mo ago
Top 1% Commenter

The bridge is being rebuilt. It's going to take about 18 months.

<https://engage.cityoffortwayne.org/bluffton-road-bridge>



37



Reply



Award



Share



...



LaVoriss Moss

March 17 at 7:27 PM · 🌐

This is so exciting to me 🥰 #Boymom so we are always at the park.. #parkhoppers...



Northside Neighborhood Association ▶ Northside Neighborhood Association Group

March 17 at 7:12 PM · 🌐

Here's what's happening at Lakeside Park!



ENGAGE.CITYOFFORTWAYNE.ORG

Lakeside Park Playground

New playground equipment and safety surfacing planned for Lakeside Park in 2025.



Dan Baisden and 48 others

ENGAGE FORT WAYNE

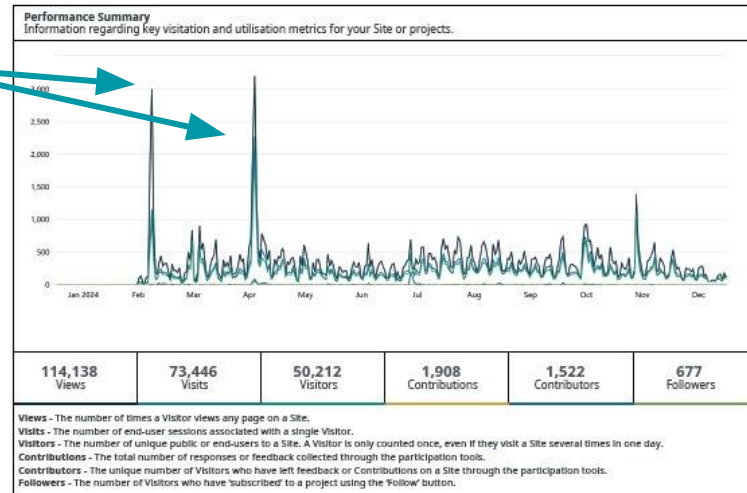
2024 ANALYTICS:
PARTICIPATION, PROJECTS, AND
SOURCES OF WEBSITE TRAFFIC

Visitor spikes on site launch and project launch days – indicates that **these are our highest impact days**, not necessarily the actual day of a “public meeting”

Power of passive engagers: Over 73,000 site visits in under a year, with over 1,900 contributions – shows broad impact and high engagement, but also great opportunity to educate the public since 32.8% of those visitors spent at least one active minute on the site, and 13.26% of them performed at least two actions (ex. Clicked on something)

How can we capture these ongoing engagers?

ENGAGE FORT WAYNE | 2024 ANALYTICS



Conversions

Information regarding how well your engagement websites converted Visitors to perform defined key actions.



55% of participants engaged from mobile devices

2024 ANALYTICS

Participation

Information regarding how people have participated in your projects and activities.

Contributions by Activity		
Contributions by Activity is a breakdown of contributions across each tool		
Activity	Contributions	%
Form	1,182	62.24%
Quick Poll	601	31.65%
Visioner	43	
Social Map	36	
Q&A	19	
Gather	13	
Conversation	5	

Top Activities

Top Activities is the top 5 tools that received the highest contributions

Activity	Page Name	Visits	Contributions
Quick Poll	Downtown Public Restrooms	443	421
Form	Curb Appeal	283	263
Form	Northwest 2035 Neighborhood Plan	131	127
Form	NOAA Urban Heat Island Mapping 2024	109	96
Quick Poll	Innovative Housing Showcase	98	90

Projects

The current number of published projects on your site

Project Status		Top Visited Projects			
144 Total Projects		Top Visited Projects is the top 5 projects the received the highest visits			
Project Name	Visitation %	Visits	Visitors		
Curb Appeal	18.18%	10,761	6,985		
Innovative Housing Showcase	8.54%	5,052	3,780		
Midwest Connect Passenger Rail - Corridor Identification & Development	7.43%	4,397	4,131		
2024 Street Resurfacing	5.03%	2,979	2,405		
Inspire Neighborhood Conference	3.96%	2,341	1,594		

2024 ANALYTICS

Acquisition

Information regarding the method by which Visitors arrived to your Site or projects.

Referral Types	
Referral traffic is the segment of traffic that arrives on your website through another source, like through a link on another domain.	
- Direct: 24,628 - 46.74% - Search Engine: 11,198 - 21.25% - Websites: 9,127 - 17.32% - Social Media: 7,653 - 14.52% - Campaigns: 85 - 0.16%	
Visitors who have arrived at a Site by entering the exact web address or URL of the page. Search Engine - Visitors who have arrived at a Site via a search engine. Such as Google, Yahoo, etc. Websites - Visitors who have arrived at the Site after clicking a link located on an external website. Social Media - Visitors who have arrived at a Site by clicking a link from a known social media site such as Facebook, X, LinkedIn, etc. Campaigns - Visitors who have arrived through a campaign (using a UTM). See your email campaign report for more details on campaigns sent from this platform.	

Downloads

Information regarding your downloads, the total set of unique documents downloaded, total downloads of all files, and your top downloads.

	3,878 Total Downloads
--	--------------------------

Top Downloads

Top file downloads in your selection, ordered by the number of downloads.

File Title	File Type	Downloads
2024 Curb Appeal Application English.pdf	PDF	194
CID application 2023.pdf	PDF	158
Fort Wayne Park System Comp Plan_Public Review-compressed_1.pdf	PDF	147
Meeting_10_7.24.23.pdf	PDF	116
Meeting_4_8.22.22.pdf	PDF	115

Document downloads were low – most downloads were tied to applications for various programs – so why spend so much time preparing lengthy PDFs?

OVERALL TOP 25 REFERRAL SOURCES

Source	Visitors	Referral Type
1 Direct	17,804	Direct
2 Google	8,779	Search Engine
3 Facebook	7,253	Social Media
4 cityoffortwayne.org	2,626	Website
5 Amazon Adsystem	1,509	Ad buy
6 2lalivenews.com	1,422	Media
7 Bing	678	Search Engine
8 wfft.com	487	Media
9 fortwayneparks.org	333	Website
10 wane.com	313	Media
11 DuckDuckGo	296	Search Engine
12 LinkedIn	307	Social Media
13 Yahoo!	183	Search Engine
14 fwcommunitydevelopment.org	151	Website
15 historicssouthwoodpark.com	139	Website
16 royaldevelopments.com	112	Website
17 niprarail.org	83	Website
18 inputfortwayne.com	83	Media
19 Yandex	76	Search Engine
20 Instagram	68	Social Media
21 morpc.org	61	Website
22 Teams - Microsoft Office	55	Website
23 Twitter	49	Social Media
24 wowo.com	41	Media
25 963xke.com	37	Media

Referral sources varied – local news, podcasts, Facebook and LinkedIn were strong sources; Reddit was the most surprising! Referral also showed that paying for ads worked well

Are QR codes successful?

SEARCH ENGINE

Source	Visitors
1 Google	8,779
2 Bing	678
3 DuckDuckGo	296
4 Yahoo!	183
5 Yandex	76

SOCIAL MEDIA

Source	Visitors
1 Facebook	7,253
2 LinkedIn	307
3 Instagram	68
4 Twitter	49
5 Reddit	20

WEBSITES

Source	Visitors
1 cityoffortwayne.org	2,626
2 fortwayneparks.org	333
3 fwcommunitydevelopment.org	151
4 historicssouthwoodpark.com	139
5 royaldevelopments.com	112

MEDIA - TV, RADIO, DIGITAL

Source	Visitors
1 2lalivenews.com	1,422
2 wfft.com	487
3 wane.com	313
4 inputfortwayne.com	296
5 wowo.com	41
6 963xke.com	37
7 insideindianabusiness.com	18
8 Journal Gazette e-edition	15
9 journalgazette.net	13
10 wboi.org	12
11 1039waynefm.com	8
12 waynedalenews.com	7
12 wbcl.org	7
14 fwmediacollaborative.com	5
15 fwbusiness.com	4
15 thelocalfw.com	4

High mobile use – prompts page design to be mostly **mobile-first**

Residents share that they appreciate how Engage Fort Wayne shows where tax dollars are going more clearly, and makes it easy to keep track of what's going on

City of
FORT WAYNE
cityoffortwayne.org

Search

Home Residents Business Visitors Services Departments Neighborhoods Contact 311

Latest News MAYOR TUCKER ANNOUNCES MAJOR REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT FOR THE NORTH RIVER SITE

MAYOR TUCKER ANNOUNCES MAJOR REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT FOR THE NORTH RIVER SITE

February 14, 2025 – Mayor Sharon Tucker and the City of Fort Wayne's Community Development Division today announced a significant redevelopment plan for the North River property.

The 29-acre site is bounded by Clinton, Harrison, and Fourth streets and serves as an important gateway into downtown Fort Wayne. The site was previously used as a rail yard and scrap yard, dating back to 1902. The land has not been actively used since 2006.

Phase one calls for the construction of the North River Fieldhouse, which would establish Fort Wayne as a key youth and adaptive sports tourism destination. Spanning 150,000 square feet, the facility would be designed to accommodate various sports and activities, including basketball, soccer, volleyball, wrestling, cheerleading, pickleball, baseball, flag football, and more. The estimated investment for the Fieldhouse is anticipated to range between \$50 million and \$60 million.

"The North River Fieldhouse has the potential to be a monumental boost for Fort Wayne," said Mayor Tucker. "The redevelopment of the full 29-acre site will serve as a new destination for visitors and residents and become one of the anchors of our vibrant riverfront district. This project will be a source of community pride and hub of activity for generations to come."

The North River Fieldhouse is expected to host at least 27 weekend tournaments annually, benefiting the local economy by driving customers to the many businesses in the vicinity of the project. Its strategic location, within a 2.5-hour drive of 10 million people, positions Fort Wayne as a point of destination. When not hosting a major tournament at the site, local athletes, schools, club teams and residents would also have access to the facility for programming, league competitions, training, and more. The venue would also be able to host numerous community events, enhancing the city's cultural landscape.

The complex would provide a state-of-the-art sports environment for youth, offering year-round access for practices and leagues. As Fort Wayne currently lacks a comparable facility, the Fieldhouse would help the city compete with regional centers such as Indianapolis and Grand Rapids.

The complex is estimated to generate approximately \$36 million in economic activity annually, supporting nearly 900 jobs and contributing approximately \$12.9 million in labor income each year. It is expected to create demand for 54,000 hotel nights annually and generate an estimated \$733,000 in tax revenue annually.

The Fort Wayne Redevelopment Commission would oversee and manage the redevelopment project. While no specific approvals are being requested at this time, future City Council approvals may be necessary for supporting infrastructure, such as water, sewer, parking garage, public space and street improvements. A detailed cost estimate for infrastructure will be completed over the next 12 months as the redevelopment plan is finalized. Additional funding sources will also be sought.

In partnership with a North River Redevelopment Advisory Committee, the City of Fort Wayne this morning issued a Request for Qualifications for a master developer interested in constructing housing, a hotel, restaurant, and retail spaces around the Fieldhouse in future phases. Mayor Tucker's Administration will request support from the Allen County Fort Wayne Capital Improvement Board of Managers (CIB) to fund the first phase of the redevelopment project, with construction anticipated to begin in 2026 following the selection of a developer and receiving the necessary approvals from governing bodies.

Please visit <https://www.cityoffortwayne.org/north-river-city> for more information.

Like 2 Share 2 Print

Difficult to view on a mobile device

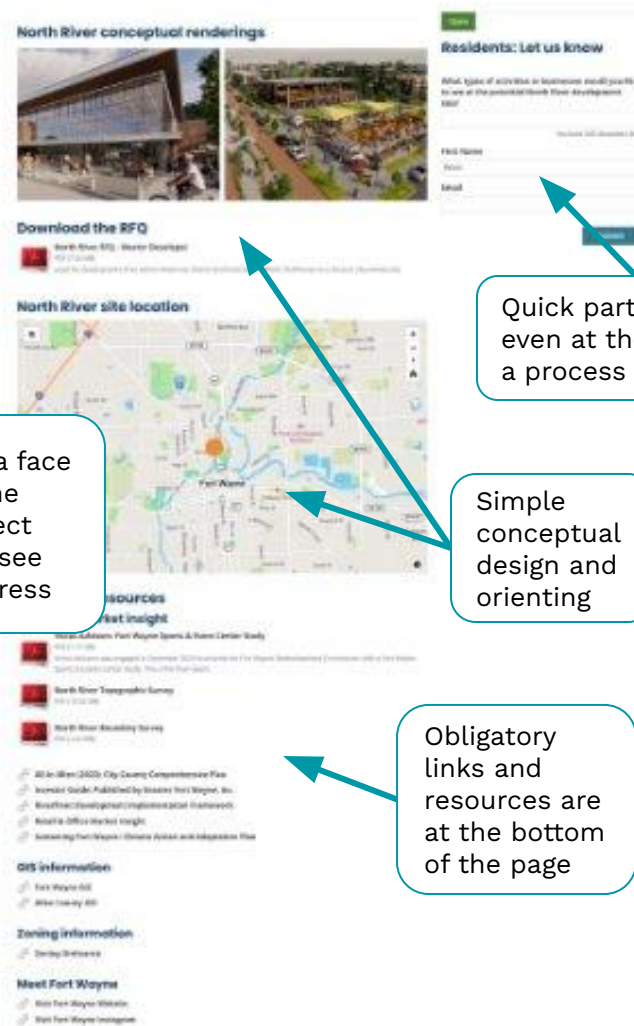
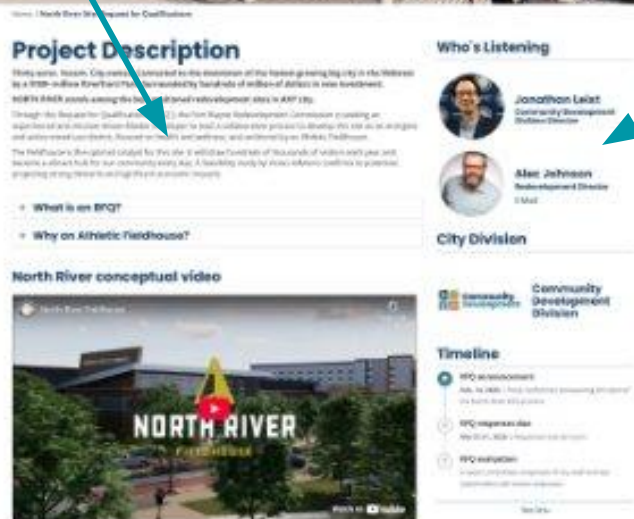
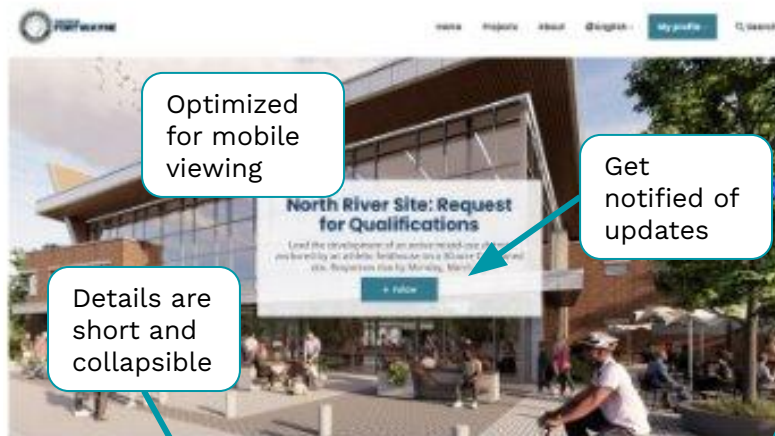
Text-heavy

Unclear if I can get involved

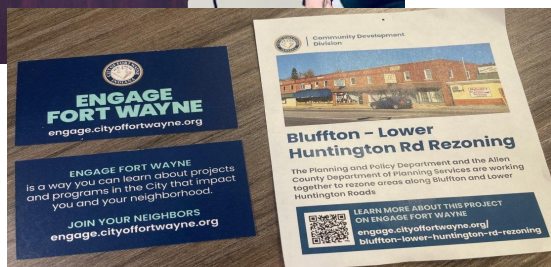
No next steps

Lots of jargon

How are we challenging the status quo of the government press release?



How do people find Engage Fort Wayne?



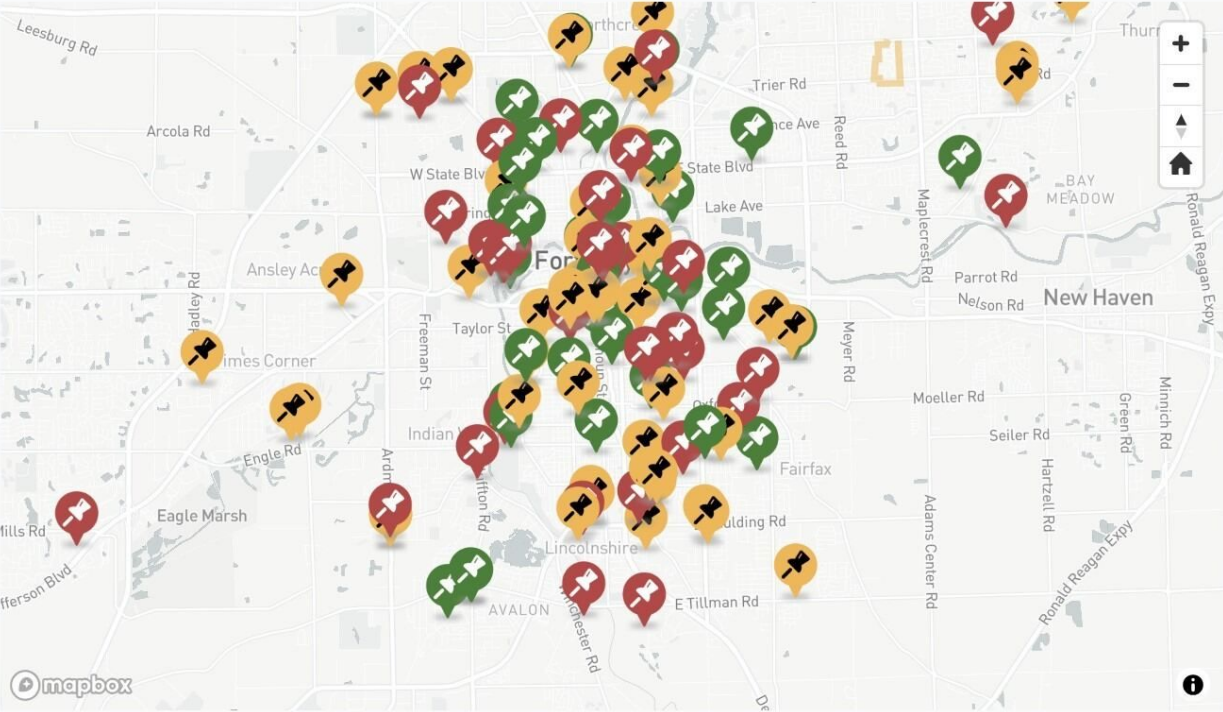
This is really a question of marketing engagement as a whole, instead of on a project-by-project basis.

- How do we make this platform user friendly for residents?
- How do we advertise a website?
 - Social media videos
 - Community presentations
 - Zoning takeaway sheets
 - Business cards with QR codes
 - Email signatures
 - Radio campaigns
 - Challenge neighborhood associations and super-engagers to be leaders in the system and to bring in registered engagers

Project Locations

Filter by Location

Filter by Category



Showing All Projects

- 

2024 Neighborhood Improvement Project
Updated: March 20, 2025
Downtown East Central ...
- 

McKinnie Commons
Updated: November 27, 2024
Southeast
- 

Northwest 2035 Neighborhood Improvement Project
Updated: February 6, 2025
Northwest
- 

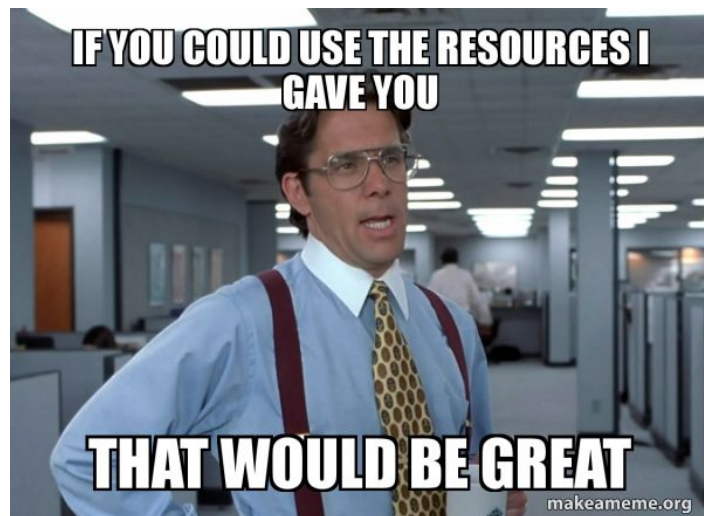
High Street CPTED Pilot Project

Questions on Challenges to Systemic Adoption

We were constantly hand-holding staff and the public to try to do better engagement.

Today, we'll try to share how we navigate these critical challenges to our engagement program:

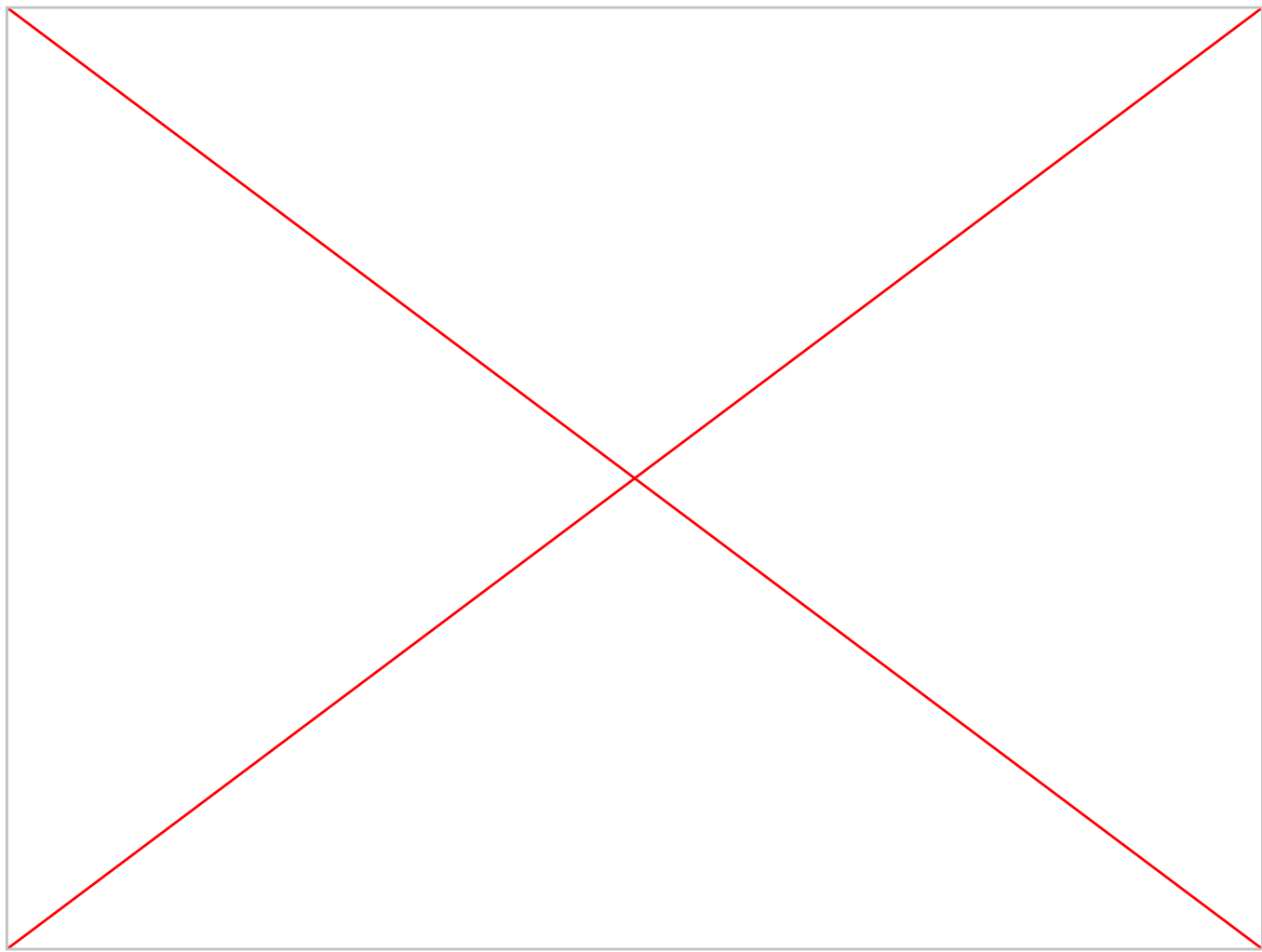
1. How did we identify the need internally, do our research to craft the right solution for Fort Wayne, and then make the pitch to leadership?
2. How do we explain to decision-makers why digital and in-person engagement will always look different? And how do we explain that it's worth it to navigate uncomfortable and challenging public discourse?
3. How do we appropriately staff this as it grows? And how do we appropriately resource the staff we already have?



How did we identify the need internally, do our research, and then make the pitch to leadership?

It all started with a plea for help to the Mayor.

- We were meeting with neighborhood groups on a regular basis and receiving **constant, negative feedback even though investments** in public resources like parks and infrastructure **were at an all-time high**
- Social media was filled with **misinformation** about City projects, and an increasing perception of mistrust
- **Initial pushback revolved around whether our least digitally-literate residents would use the system**
- Looked to peer municipalities for guidance and connected with Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which had launched a digital engagement platform four years earlier, using the same system we use today
- Built a relationship with our platform provider that enables us to continue to evolve and learn from peer municipalities

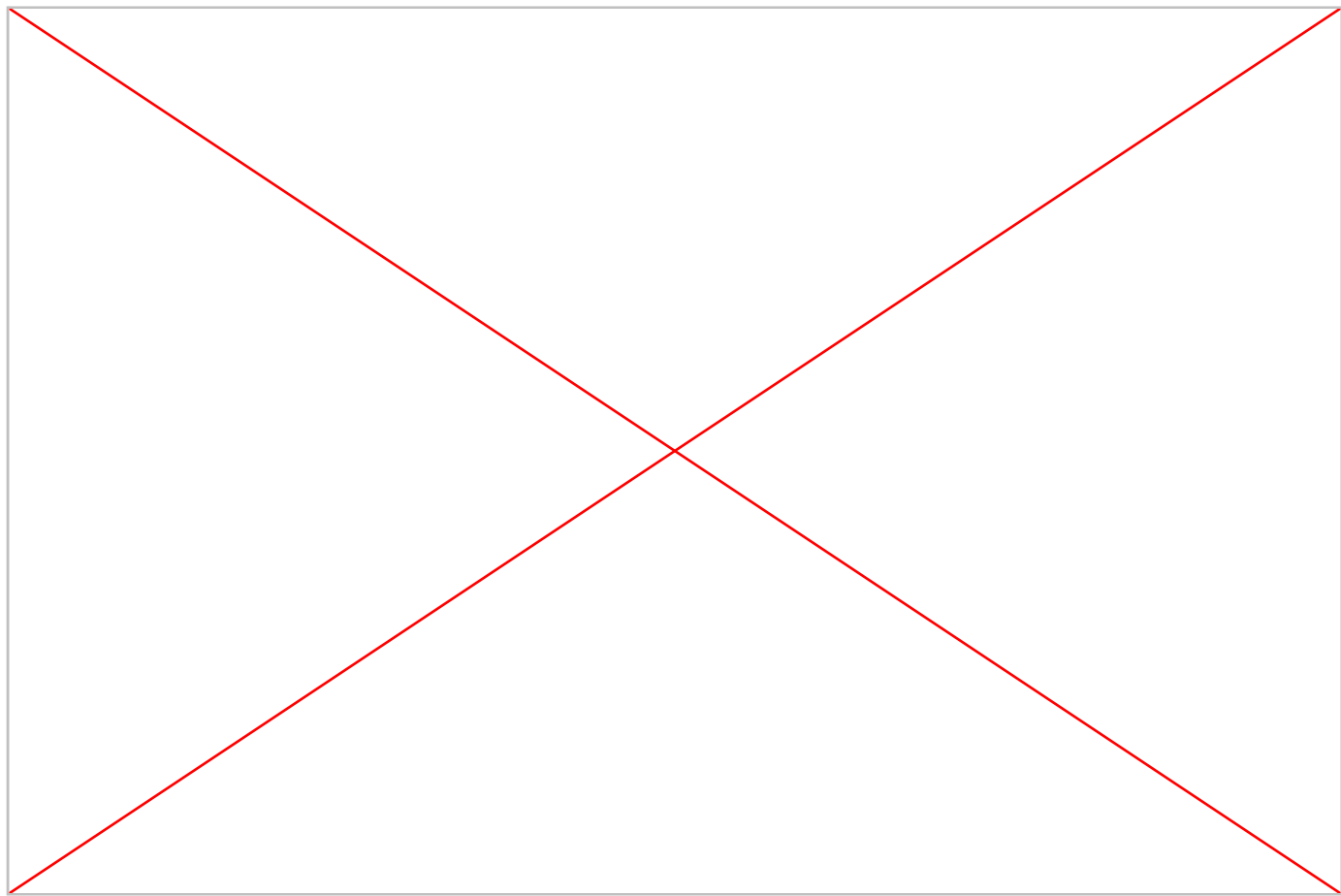


How did we identify the need internally, do our research, and then make the pitch to leadership?

It all started with a plea for help to the Mayor.

- We were meeting with neighborhood groups on a regular basis and receiving **constant, negative feedback even though investments** in public resources like parks and infrastructure **were at an all-time high**
- Social media was filled with **misinformation** about City projects, and an increasing perception of mistrust
- **Initial pushback revolved around whether our least digitally-literate residents would use the system**
- Looked to peer municipalities for guidance and connected with Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which had launched a digital engagement platform four years earlier, using the same system we use today
- Built a relationship with our platform provider that enables us to continue to evolve and learn from peer municipalities

Hi [redacted] — [redacted] told me that he wanted you to create an Engage page before March 25, when Public Works is having a news conference to preview all their projects for the year. I've attached the press release and the long, long list of projects. That project list will likely be updated between now and then because that's what happens every year. When it's updated, I'll do my best to remember to send you the updated document. [redacted] will be the "Who's Listening" person.



How did we identify the need internally, do our research, and then make the pitch to leadership?

Communications is not just how you advertise things, it's also how you talk to people and it will always vary staff-to-staff and person-to-person.

Who are you communicating to?

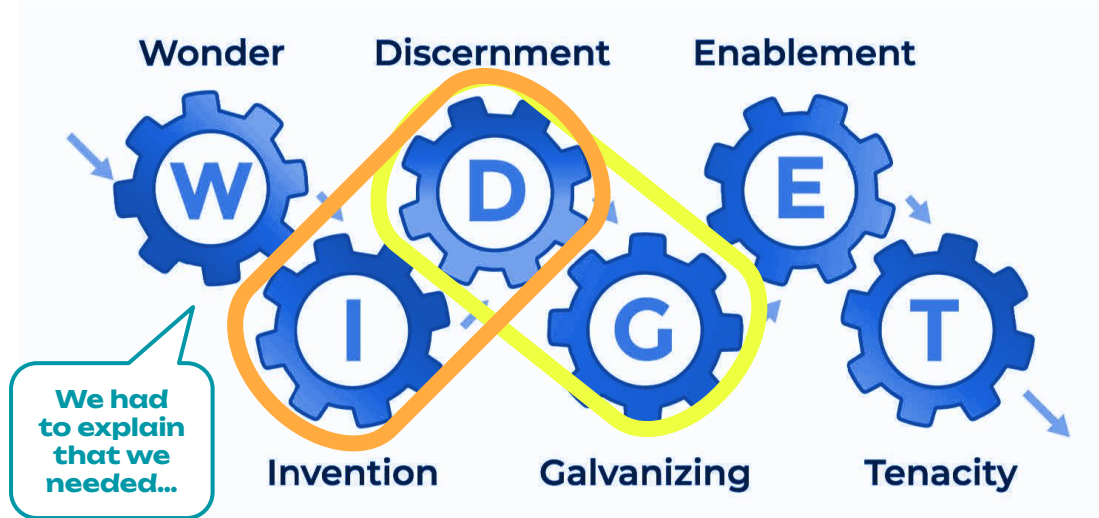
You can generally assume that the public is coming from a low-trust perspective.

And while in-person engagement works, your community will be broader if you include digital involvement opportunities.

Who is communicating the work?

Of all City of Fort Wayne managers who took the WIDGET test, 90% scores in Wonder/Invention or Enablement/Tenacity, and less than 5% had a score with Discernment or Galvanizing. **These are your “project sellers”.**

- With so few managers with D or G skills, it was hard to get staff to act, support or believe in the work
- Learning to “work at the speed of trust” – internal belief leads to external trust



How do we explain to decision-makers why digital and in-person engagement will always look different? And how do we explain that it's worth it to navigate uncomfortable public discourse?

- Every solution doesn't have to (and probably shouldn't) address every problem or need
 - Your in-person and digital engagement strategies can run in parallel and target different audiences
 - It's ok if your online engagement better reaches younger communities than older communities
 - It's your job as the project manager to intentionally and equally value feedback regardless of how it is collected – both in your own assessment and in how you present that feedback to decision-makers
- Going back to Government & Planning 101: this work exists to navigate “wicked problems” (i.e. problems that cannot be solved)
 - Public discourse is the only way to identify community needs
 - Well-moderated spaces are critical to engendering trust in government, and to not scaring off your less negative or more open-minded community members
 - By providing space to ask difficult questions, you can connect communities with the right resources
- Example from Pittsburgh, PA: can you proceed with a university district neighborhood that engaged no students?



How do we appropriately staff this as it grows? And how do we appropriately resource the staff we already have?

In the beginning there was only me.

- Engagement is a small part of everyone's job, regardless of their training, and there is no central, expert resource on public engagement and its relationship to government communications
- A champion (me!) took on the task of developing that knowledge and sharing it with colleagues, slowly building a following and showing the impact of better best practices
- At the launch of Engage Fort Wayne, it was staffed entirely by that champion, and was small portion of their much larger role

Inflection point for staffing of Engage Fort Wayne:

- Mayor Tucker started to use the platform regularly and saw that the tool was in too high demand to be so minimally resourced as it grew, recognizing the need to ensure the engagement remained of quality as the quantity of City staff using it increased
- Full-time Engagement Coordinator hired recently!



Communicating about Engagement, Digitally

User Experience

- Create legitimacy and transparency in your engagement efforts by linking your engagement from the homepage, popular landing pages, and topic-related subpages
- Be clear about how much time an engagement will take, and offer a short option when possible
- Indicate how a conversation will be moderated and follow up, if possible, when individuals violate those moderation policies
- **Design communications and engagements to be accessible to your audience** – that complex, interactive map or rendering might be really interesting to an urban planner or architect, but the general public might struggle to participate
- Include generic calls to action on transactional pages, and time-bound calls to action on topic-specific pages
- Use action-oriented, welcoming language to encourage participation and tell people clearly when to come back for more info
- Keep your webpage short, and don't get bogged down in content at the top (consider page design that lets people “opt in” to the long-form content and background)
- **Meet your colleagues where they are and be supportive while challenging them**

Social Media

- Use this as a powerful megaphone and **make it clear where you are and are not accepting feedback in collaborative processes**
- Consider NextDoor, YouTube, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and Reddit
- Share direct links with clear calls to action tailored to the individual, and use tracking links so you can see which strategies are working best in your referrals



**How do we get
someone from a
furious local to a
curious local?**

Discussion

**What's a creative
engagement
strategy you've
seen work for an
engagement?**

**How do you use
digital and
traditional
engagement
strategies to
achieve
representative-
ness?**

Breakout Room Activity

Activity

Discuss roadblocks and opportunities to implement new engagement strategies in your own organizations.

- What are some ideas for quick wins around engagement that you've been thinking about or are excited to try?
- What would a successful public engagement program look like for your organization?

4

4 groups with at least four people each

15

Minutes

Thank you!

Keep in touch. We're happy
to stick around and chat.

...and come visit Fort Wayne!



socialpinpoint

