Facilitating Change – Virtual Exhibition

Introduction

As face-to-face interactions and group gatherings continue to be severely restricted, significant innovation is allowing dialogues to continue online. The Covid-19 pandemic has shifted almost every element of our lives online which has not only accelerated the adoption of digital technology but has also legitimised digital engagement approaches. According to a recent report on **'The Future of Engagement'** produced by the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) in conjunction with Grayling Engage[1], stakeholders now expect to engage online and are likely to assume that such channels will continue to be available after the pandemic.
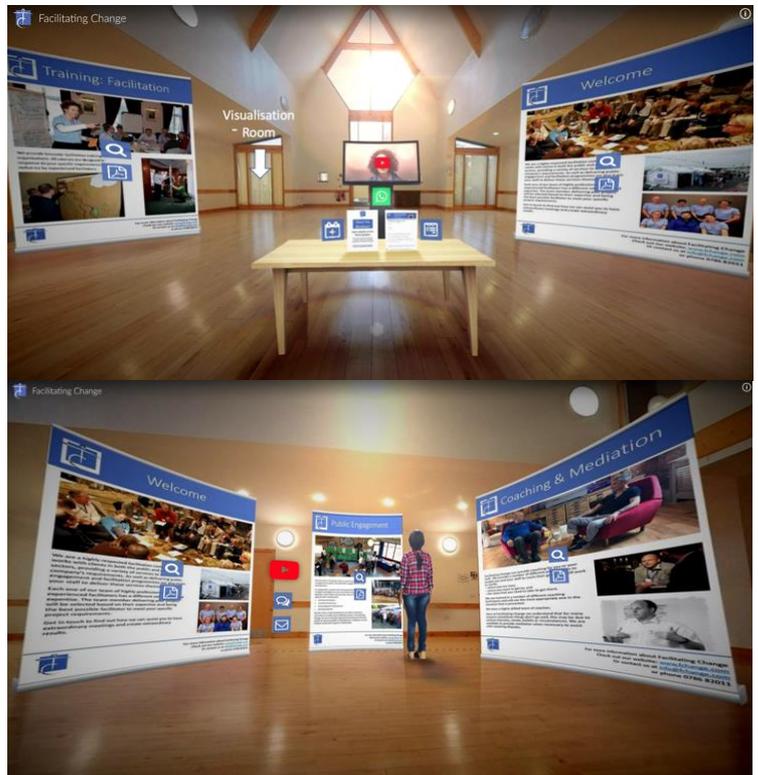
Blended approach to engagement

The increasing use of digital technology provides an opportunity to encourage interest and participation with a broader demographic base than traditional methods have achieved in the past. However, the pandemic has also increased barriers to engagement. Some community members may continue to be nervous about attending face-to-face events for some time or will have lost the confidence to take part in engagement activities. To address these issues, **'The Future of Engagement'** recommends a blended approach utilising both digital and face-to-face techniques.

Virtual Town Hall

Creating an online virtual exhibition to visually replicate the experience of a traditional town hall event is one method of engaging communities in a format that is easy for stakeholders to recognise and understand. The Facilitating Change 'virtual town hall' provides a project portal which can sit alongside and enhance a range of digital and non-digital approaches to engagement. Key features are as follows:

Key Features

- Flexible design to meet your requirements
- 'Always open' virtual exhibition
- Regularly updated content
- Set in local halls
- Option for multiple rooms and projects
- Various contact options and links to social media (eg WhatsApp, Facebook, email)
- Signposting and booking options for 'live' virtual events (eg Zoom meetings & Teams)
- Integrated video content (including BSL signing to improve accessibility)
- Downloadable PDF content
- Links to online project questionnaire
- Moderated message boards

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[1] https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/7258/the-future-of-engagement.pdf

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https://www.fchange.com/virtual-exhibition/

Use of local halls

We can take 3-D photographs of a village hall local to your development (subject to access) to use as the location for your virtual exhibition. The Facilitating Change virtual town hall features Bridge of Allan Parish Church, near Stirling. Making a donation to the Hall Committee for use of their hall provides an immediate benefit to the community and can help to initiate a dialogue with local community members.

Scottish Government compliance

The Scottish Government has issued planning guidance on pre-application consultations for public events in light of the Coronavirus pandemic[2] and this has been used to inform the design of the Facilitating Change virtual town hall. In particular, the developer can use the virtual town hall to comply with the guidance by:

- Enabling two-way interaction between the developer and those wanting to express a view
- Hosting the virtual town hall at a central, free, publicly accessible web location
- Identifying the pre-application engagement process
- Identifying the location and details of the proposal
- Being as user-friendly as possible
- Advertising and facilitating at least one event of 2-3 hours duration with a live Q&A session
- Linking to other opportunities for the public to make comment, ask questions and receive responses
- Complying with current Data Protection obligations
- Providing access to the information without requiring members of the public to join or sign-up
- Ensuring that the information provided can be read, downloaded and printed at whatever pace the person accessing it requires
- Responding to questions or requests for clarification and allow for any further reply in that regard

Increasing involvement

A key recommendation of **'The Future of Engagement'** report is that it should not be assumed that digital engagement will expand involvement on its own. The report's research found that *"the biggest barrier in public consultation and engagement was not hearing about opportunities to get involved"*. Promoting the activity in a manner that is informed by an understanding of the media consumption habits of the demographic groups you are trying to reach is critical. Facilitating Change can advise on all aspects of stakeholder engagement and community consultation to devise, deliver, evaluate and report on a comprehensive programme of blended engagement approaches.

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[2] https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-planning-guidance-on-pre-application-consultations-for-public-events/

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