RESEARCH
FOR THE
INDUSTRY

DIGITAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN AUSTRALIA

ARNETECH
About People

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Todays digital engagement practice can largely be characterized by the presence of an online survey, online submissions and more commonly a dedicated engagement portal or website. The tools are recognized for their cost effectiveness and potential to reach a broader audience in a short space of time.

Shifts in technology are starting to have an impact on tool selection. For example, the use of augmented reality in urban planning projects, mobile apps that target audiences and ask for feedback based on their location. Or, as one example in this report illustrates, using virtual reality and gamification to build capacity (in this case, of young people).

Where governments and other organisations sit on the spectrum of digital engagement tools varies. As this research highlights, the appetite might be there for many practitioners, but the organisation lacks capacity, resources and or willingness to dip their toes in the unknown waters of these emerging technologies.

However, tool selection is only one part of the picture. Many organisations are facing fundamental barriers to engagement (whether this be offline or online) and this has an impact on how they engage online. As the report shows, the more risk averse organisations, particularly governments, tend to stick with what they know (the online survey) as they believe this tool enables a fair and equitable process whilst remaining relatively low risk. Others may lack leadership support, which can impact the capacity of employees to be able to plan and deliver projects that involve more two or three way digital engagement tools.

Addressing the external barriers: the digital divide, dealing with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, the young, older people, all bring additional challenges that can't be addressed with digital tools used in isolation. However, as this report highlights, some practitioners are discovering ways in which online tools can be used to address the digital divide, and, when integrated with a program of effective offline activities, deliver a successful engagement that builds and strengthens relationships.

Although not discussed in detail in this report, other factors starting to have more of an impact on tool choice and our engagement approach more generally are the political and regulatory environment we are heading into.

For example in Victoria, Local Government Act reforms and the Victorian Auditor General Report into *Public Participation and Community Engagement: Local Government Sector* identifies how important having a robust backbone to all engagement processes will be in the future auditing environment. All elements will be critical including, demonstrating the relationship between feedback and policy outcomes, engagement strategy and a clearer emphasis on skills, monitoring and evaluation. This echoes some of the key themes highlighted by practitioners in this research.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

This research does not advocate for a digital first approach to engagement. Today, it is generally accepted that 'best practice' typically involves a multi channel, integrated (offline and online) approach. What this research does seek to provide is:

* A benchmark of current tools being used.
* Information about what influences tool selection.
* Comments, tips and case studies, to help practitioners address barriers to digital engagement.

BARRIERS TO DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT

Within the research practitioners were asked about what internal barriers were impacting their implementation of digital engagement tools or services. Key themes about how to address these barriers emerged out of their responses. These included:

* Evaluation, managing data and the need for better engagement reporting.
* Organisational culture, in particular how building employee capacity in engagement can lead to better practice and enable more effective digital approaches.

Practitioners were also asked about barriers to digital engagement experienced by the citizens they were trying to engage. Many practitioners also shared their experiences of dealing with hard-to-reach groups. The following key themes emerged as common approaches to addressing the barriers that citizens faced:

* Integration of offline and digital methods.
* A person centred approach to engagement design.
* Relying upon established networks.
* Building relationships to engage and activate.

The report provides a table that illustrates best practice approaches, tools and tips for engaging with different hard-to-reach groups that practitioners shared.

A case study from Metro South Health is provided in the report as an example that combines many of the key themes that arose out of the research. The appendix provides a list of digital tools currently being used as a useful reference for practitioners.

BACKGROUND

Supported by the International Association for Public Participation Australasia (IAP2A), ArneTech conducted research exploring digital engagement practice in Australia.

The purpose of the research was to understand:

- What digital tools or services practitioners find most effective in enabling informed decision-making?
- How practitioners are overcoming barriers to digital engagement?

These questions were explored using a combination of online survey, case study interviews and literature review.

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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Aug 2018
Phase One

Consultation with IAP2 members to inform and finalise the scope of research

17 responses received
+
conversations with industry experts

Oct - Dec 2018
Phase Two

Survey IAP2 network and wider stakeholder groups

Conduct case study interviews

120 survey responses

8 case study interviews

Jan - Mar 2019
Phase Three

Draft and finalise report

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WHO WE SPOKE TO

Demographic data on the 120 survey respondents

LOCATION OF
RESPONDENTS

3% NT

18% QLD

6% WA

8% SA

21% NSW

1% ACT

33% VIC

3% OVERSEAS

5% TAS

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12% OTHER (NFP, NGO, EDUCATION)

26% COMPANY

ORGANISATION
TYPES

6% INDIVIDUAL

24% LOCAL GOVERNMENT

32% STATE GOVERNMENT

Inner Urban **63**

Suburban **27**

Rural **14**

REGIONS OF
RESPONDENTS

Other **16**

25   50   75
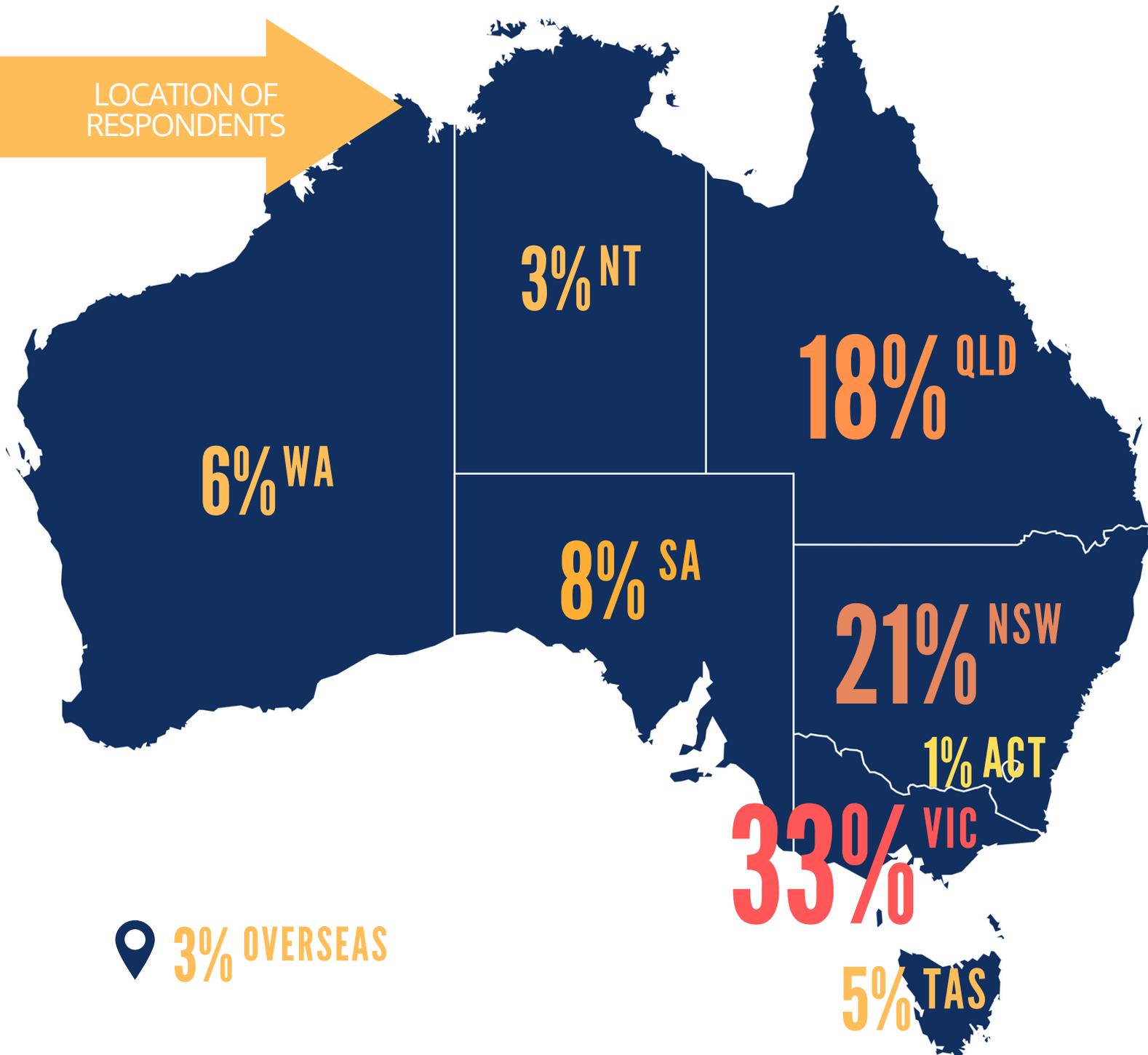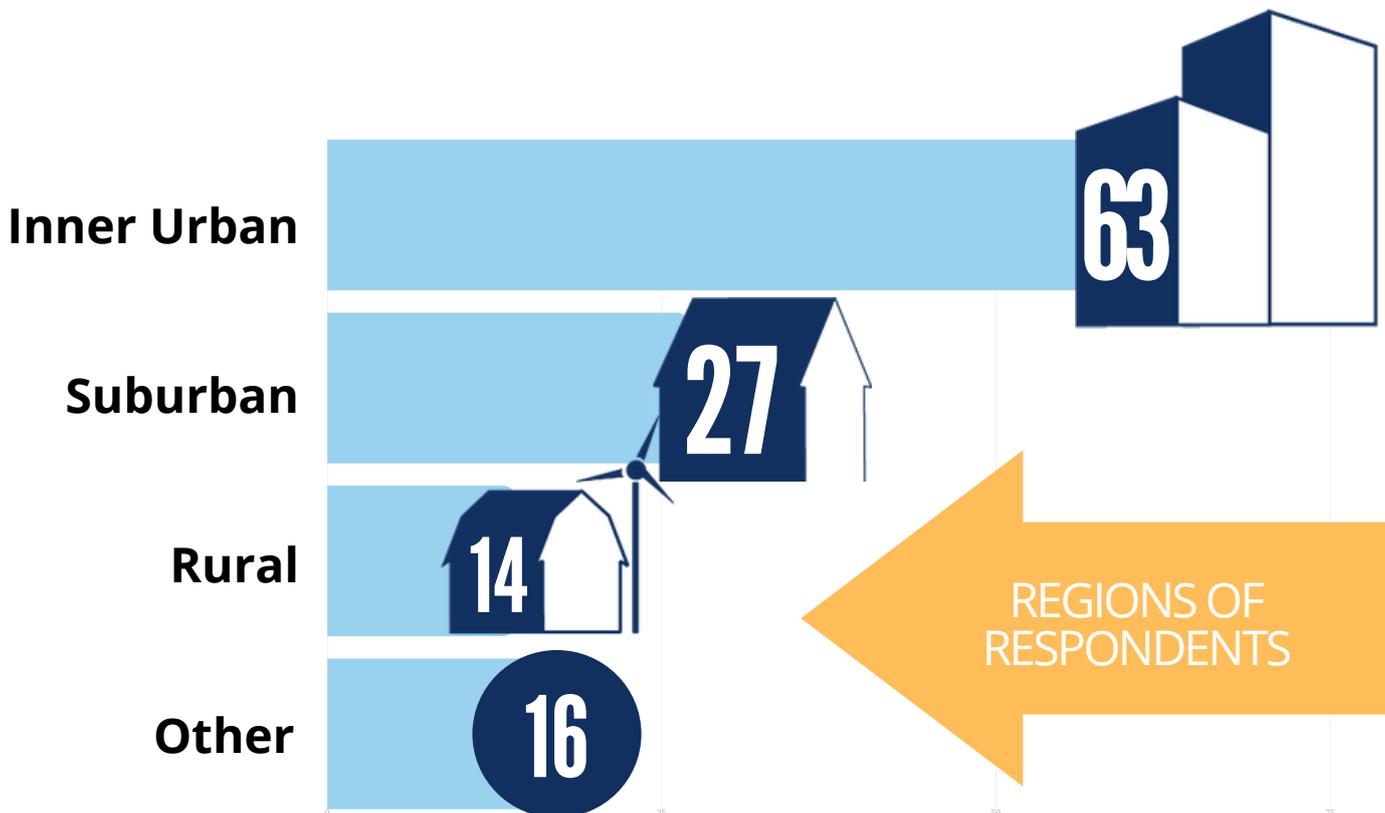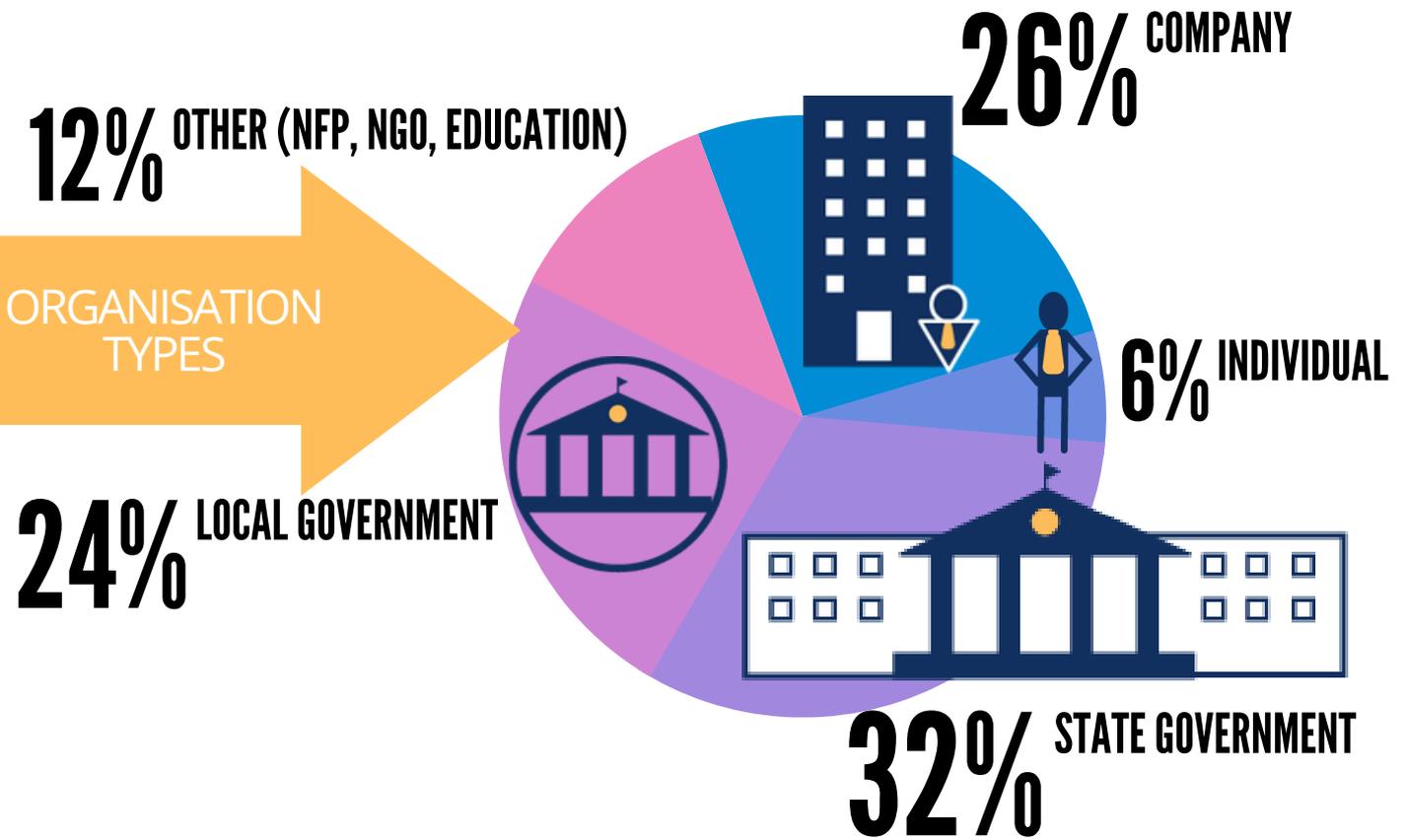
KEY FINDINGS

What digital tools or services do practitioners use ?

ONLINE SURVEYS

39%

voted as the tool most often used

EMERGING TOOLS

48%

had never used emerging tools and technologies

Tools rated effective* at enabling informed decision-making were:

ONLINE SURVEYS

43%

INTERACTIVE MAPPING

37%

ONLINE SUBMISSIONS

33%

*percentage of respondents that voted these tools as 'Most Effective'

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Top tool choices by organisation type:

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

ONLINE SURVEYS
56% ALWAYS USE

ENGAGEMENT PLATFORM
40% ALWAYS USE

STATE GOVERNMENT

ONLINE SUBMISSIONS/

ONLINE SURVEYS
33% ALWAYS USE

FACEBOOK
31% ALWAYS USE

INDIVIDUALS

ONLINE SUBMISSIONS/

ONLINE SURVEYS/

ENGAGEMENT PLATFORM/

FACEBOOK
33% ALWAYS USE

PRIVATE COMPANIES

ONLINE SUBMISSIONS
50% OFTEN USE
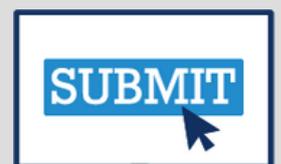
ONLINE SURVEYS
46% OFTEN USE

ENGAGEMENT PLATFORM
35% OFTEN USE

Barriers to engagement:

BARRIER	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS
Accessibility issues (e.g. tool or content is not accessible)	56
Engagement isn't appealing or meaningful	54
Access to digital tools	53
Level of perceived empowerment or decision-making ability	51
Connectivity/lack of broadband access	43
Cultural considerations	43
Security concerns about use of data/privacy/anonymity	40
English literacy	38
Unsure	2

Methods to address barriers:

BARRIER	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS
Integrate offline and online	47
Nothing (no funding, slow to bring leaders onboard)	9
Person centred (tailored)	8
Capacity building	6
Visibly engaging and simple presentation	6
Improving accessibility	5
Promotion	4
Registration	4
Tool selection	4
Purposeful/impact	1

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Methods used to engage:

Twitter
Participatory Tools (e.g. Budgeting)
Instagram
Online Submissions
Ideation or Brainstorming
Engagement Platform that Hosts a Variety of Tools
Discussion forums
Interactive Mapping Tools
Emerging Tools
Online Surveys
Facebook

0   5   10   15   20

NO. OF PARTICIPANTS
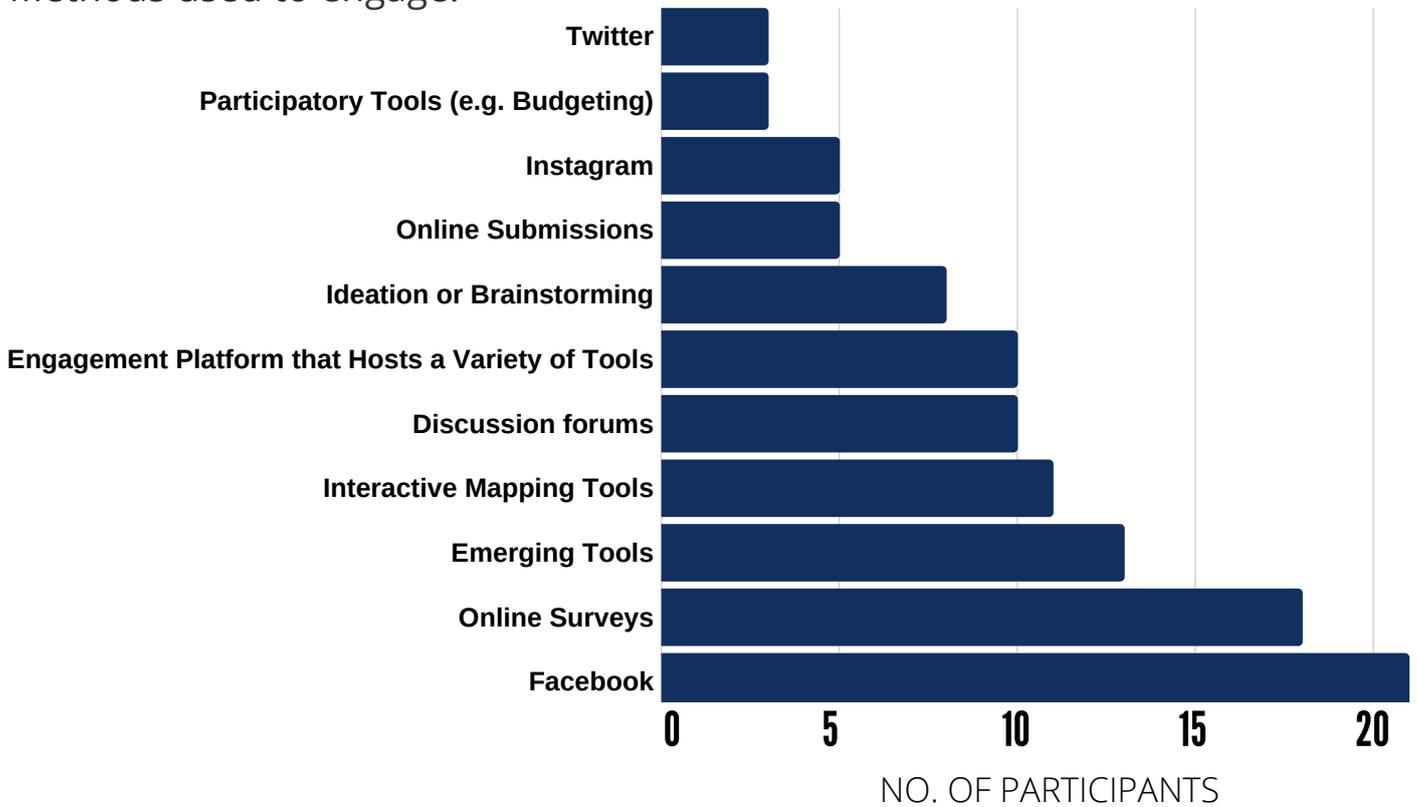
Methods used to activate Hard-to-Reach groups:

2% IDEATION/BRAINSTORMING

9% FACEBOOK/SOCIAL MEDIA

2% LOCAL RADIO

34% FACE-TO-FACE

26% WORKING WITH ESTABLISHED LEADERS/GROUPS

2% INCENTIVES

15% TRADITONAL OFFLINE TECHNIQUES

2% AVATAR SURVEYS

6% EVENTS

2% VIDEO
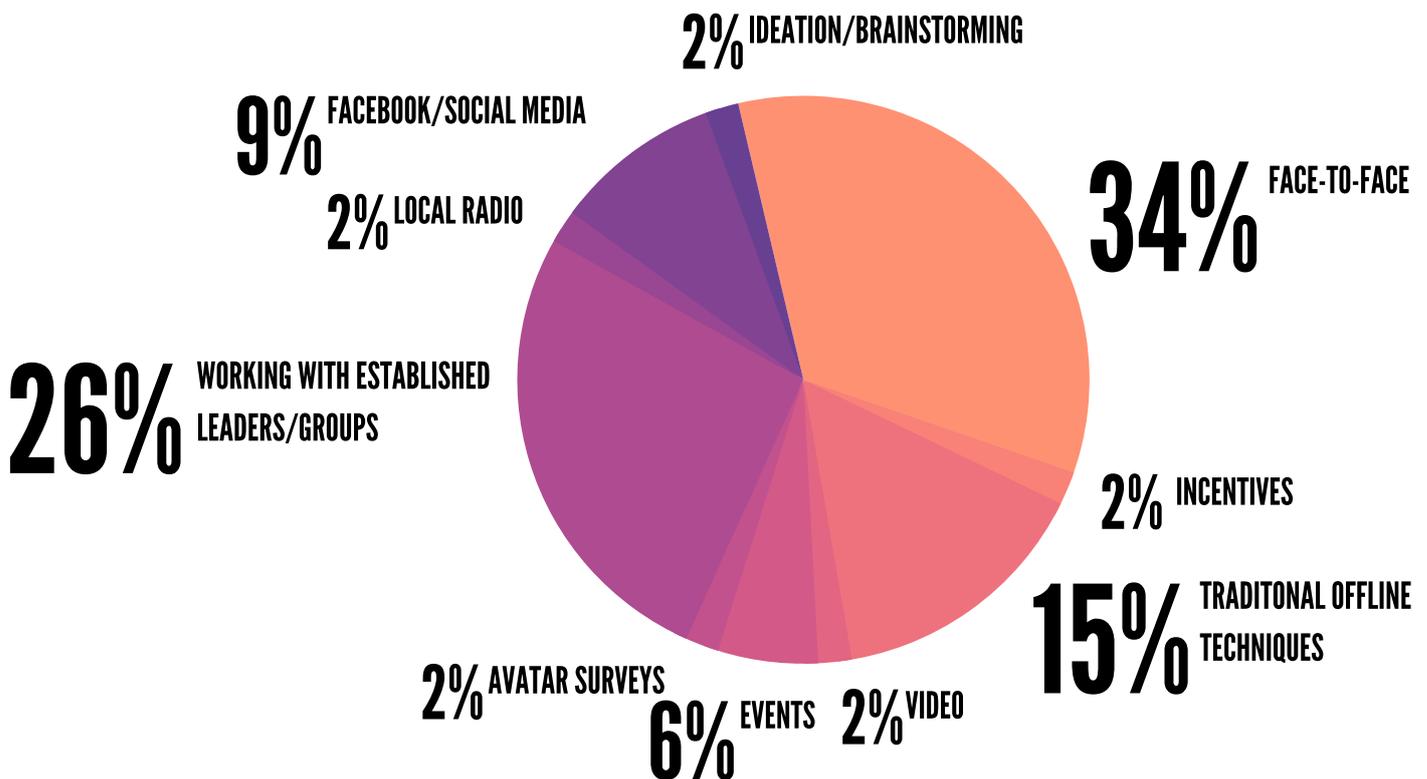
KEY INSIGHTS

The research identified the following key themes.

WHAT INFLUENCES TOOL SELECTION?

As practitioners it may come as no surprise that the online survey is the most common tool choice in the digital toolkit.

This seems logical, as practitioners believe the online survey to be the most effective tool at enabling informed decisions. But, is this the reason why it is so frequently relied upon?

One engagement consultant interviewed agreed that in the case of local government, the online survey is popular as it serves the needs of public servants, it gets the answers they want whilst seeming to be fair and equitable.

Some practitioners believe that tool choice depends on an organisations level of risk aversion. One consultant explained this using the three tiers of feedback tool. Organisations climb the ladder of risk as they go up the tiers. Governments tend to stay on the lower levels, favouring one-way survey tools, as they tend to be more risk averse.

"We are slowly gaining traction for the use of digital platforms but largely as a 'delivery' mechanism for submissions and less so for interactive engagement. We are still limited by the perception of the need to control the flow of input."

Social media tools were seen by some to be for the sole purpose of promotion rather than a tool to gather feedback. Others, like those who engage with remote regional communities, found that relying on existing local Facebook pages was a preferred method rather than creating a new online destination that wasn't likely to get much traffic or attention.

"The size and nature of projects in the NT means we rarely get clients to sign up for using digital tools that may mean additional project cost."

EVALUATION AND MANAGING DATA

A key argument the research highlighted was that tool selection is really only one part of the picture, as one participant commented:

"Yes, the major players with bigger budgets are starting to use the VR tools but capturing feedback is only one part of the picture. Understanding how to close the loop, provide efficient insights through qualitative analysis and feed this back to audiences is key."

Within the research, participants highlighted that they are experiencing a growing need for better reporting in a way that allows citizens to truly understand if the policy objective is being met. In addition, reporting back to the community and closing the loop were suggested as key ways to establishing trust with your stakeholders.

"People need to know what's going on throughout the project lifecycle. There needs to be regular feedback to those who participate at key stages. All results made public. Show how decisions are made."

At the same time, we are being encouraged to make better use of data that already exists within an organisation.

Existing data can be used to understand the needs, values and behaviours of the citizens we are engaging with. Prior to consulting, this can help to inform planning, improve the customer experience and create a natural, trustworthy and meaningful engagement process.

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

A common theme that arose throughout the research attributed lack of digital engagement activity to organizational culture. Reference was made to executive buy-in limiting digital engagement uptake and capacity building opportunities.

"In my opinion, the internal cultural barriers are the main impediment and drag on uptake of digital technology to empower and enable engagement."

Others gave examples of how changes within their organisation's culture are driving their engagement approach and enabling employees.

"We are in the middle of a cultural revolution within the organisation which is proving fruitful. We started by rewriting our charter of consultation within a new stakeholder engagement framework using an internal deliberative process that empowered staff who were previously disengaged and largely unconvinced of the value of the engagement. We have a way to go but the early signs (measured by large external customer perception survey) that this is working are very positive."

Lack of digital expertise and capacity building were identified as common barriers to digital engagement. For many organisations, the responsibility for digital engagement falls to anyone with the time and willingness to try, but not always the expertise. In addition, many are challenged by the responsibility for digital engagement being split across teams and/or working in silos.

"…good digital engagement takes time and a specific skill set and we often don't have either."

Within the research, one participant demonstrated how transferring a project-based digital tool to an ongoing engagement solution was made possible through capacity building. Enabling the team to test out the platforms capabilities, internal stakeholders witnessed the benefits, which helped to establish trust in the approach. They were then able to transition to using it across the business.

Many other comments supported this idea of capacity building as a way of influencing change and enabling better use of digital engagement tools.

"Getting knowledge out to staff, improving their practice so that they can champion and demonstrate best practice and carry that on to influence change."

In another case study, the participant shared how their organisation was delivering an Engagement Champions program. The program will deliver a range of staff tools and templates to enable them to deliver their own projects successfully. This includes a matrix of engagement techniques and an engagement brief amongst other capacity building tools.

One of the key purposes is to achieve a consistent approach to engagement in addition to addressing the challenge of dealing with over-engaged communities.

INTEGRATION OF OFFLINE AND DIGITAL METHODS

A popular theme throughout the research was the importance of integrating traditional and digital engagement activities. This includes, providing multiple opportunities to engage, mirroring offline activities online (and vice versa) and using face-to-face opportunities to drive stakeholders to engage online.

"Always combine online engagement with face-to-face. We never do it without a genuine commitment to also building relationships and trust."

"By offering a range of engagement tools outside of online platforms we aim to ensure a cross section of community and stakeholders are able to participate. Where appropriate, we will take online devices to enable people to fill in surveys etc during face to face sessions"

How can we integrate the digital and traditional worlds more effectively? Many participants believe it comes back to planning and process design. Rather than treating digital as a communications tool tagged onto the end of an engagement, all elements need to be mapped out together. The digital needs to mirror and support the broader engagement design.

Examples include replicating interactive digital mapping with a paper map and sticky dots, combining face-to-face forums with an online forum or live stream. We are starting to see more digital deliberation techniques used along side traditional activities and some believe before long this will be commonplace. As Max Hardy comments "It is already starting. The digital platforms are there already, and the potential for this to be refined, simplified and made more interesting is immeasurable"

PERSON-CENTERED APPROACH

Participants expressed the importance of a person-centred approach to engagement planning (whether it be when using traditional or digital engagement techniques). Designing the process according to a citizens needs, behaviours and values rather than a one size fits all approach will allow for more meaningful data collection and help to establish relationships. The importance of this technique was reinforced in comments regarding engaging with hard-to-reach groups.

Practices such as user-testing and engaging citizens early to help design the approach were also suggested as techniques that could enable more effective digital engagement.

"Advocating person-centredness of engagement approach, taking into account and minimising barriers for the target engagement audience. User testing".

"Engaging with groups early to help create, test (and) modify engagement design and content...and get it right from the start plus bring people along for the journey."

One case study example demonstrated using a person-centred approach and an interweaving of digital and traditional techniques. For this agency, customer reference groups were asked to test and provide feedback on the language used in a statewide survey. The reference groups were made up of 22 randomly recruited customers who covered various segments; residential, business, regional, metro, aboriginal

and CALD groups. The groups met five times physically and were encouraged to engage through the website. The feedback was used to refine the survey, its language, the way it flowed and the length of the survey. Recommendations made by the group were also recorded and incorporated into future business planning.

This type of process can help to reduce barriers to digital engagement. In addition, listening to and taking the advice of your customers helps to build a relationship of trust and identify ways your community wish to be engaged with for future projects.

The New Zealand Governments 'Online Engagement Guidance' suggests mapping user journeys as a useful technique to consider when engagement planning. Mapping the steps a user takes as they go through each phase in your process (both online and offline) can help refine objectives, select appropriate methods and track the progress of your engagement. It can also help to ensure that your traditional and digital methods are successfully integrated.

ENGAGING HARD TO REACH GROUPS

Relying upon established networks and building relationships to engage and activate was identified to be one of the significant ways of addressing barriers to engaging with hard-to-reach groups. For example, when dealing with CALD communities, practitioners recommended establishing how these groups would like to engage with you prior to designing your process. Often these cultures may not be experienced in engaging with governments or organisations in this way, in addition to facing language and digital competency barriers.

"Seeing online as only one part of picture. Prior established trusted relationships are key, outreach, face-to-face, personal ask, local newsletters, snowballing. All of which takes time."
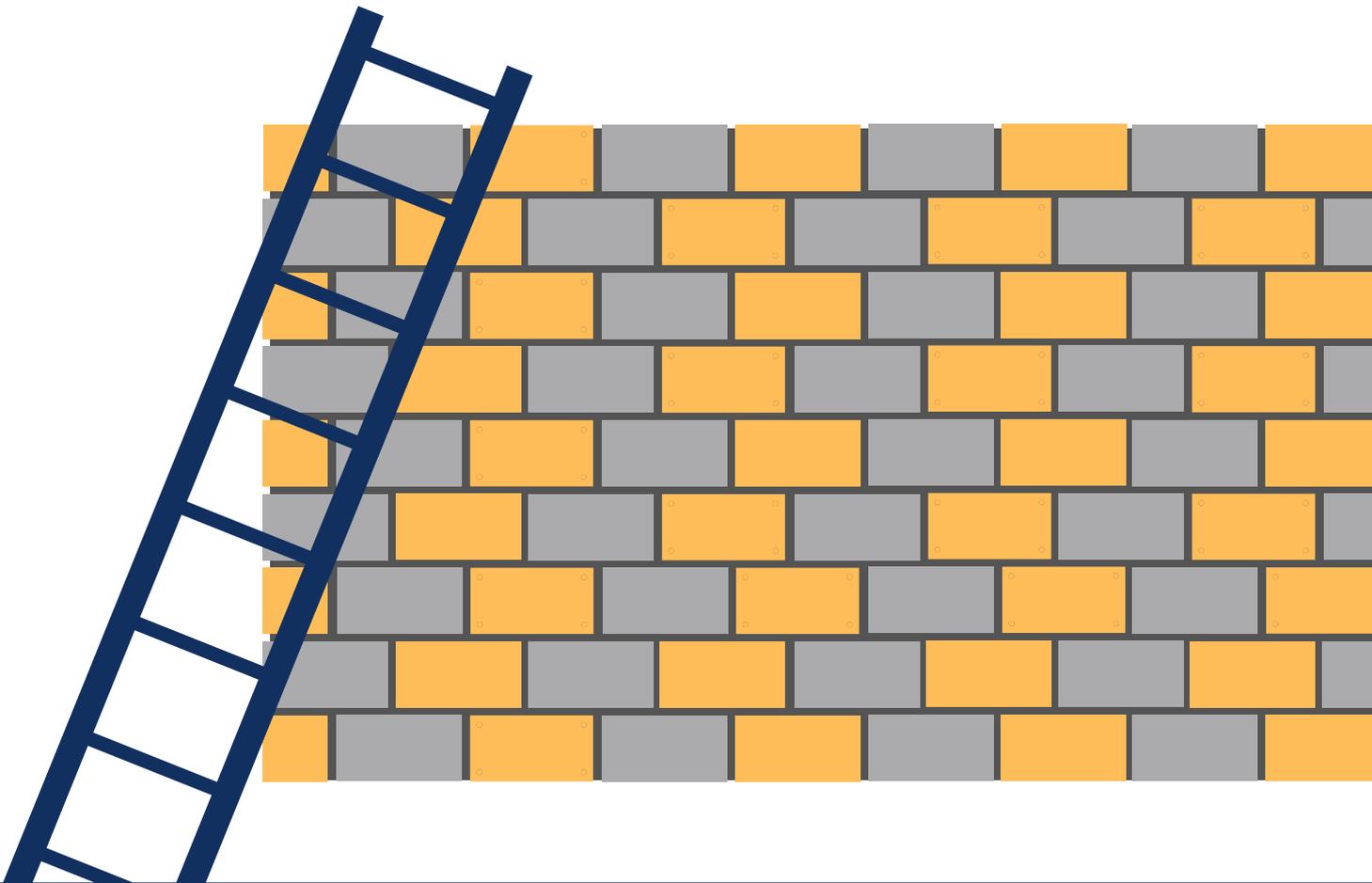
This table indicates the engagement techniques used to engage with various hard-to-reach groups. Quotes to demonstrate the activity are also provided.

Group	Technique	Comments
CALD/Seniors	• Create and/or draw upon existing partnerships with trusted and known leaders. • Face-to-face events. • Digital can be integrated with traditional methods. For example, complete online surveys on tablets on their behalf. • Provide translation services.	"Working with leaders or known/trusted people of such groups - to promote, ask their advice, test online engagement tools."
Indigenous groups/CALD	• Story-telling exercises. • Partner with existing and established online communities (e.g. local Facebook pages). • Especially important to use established groups to understand how they would like to engage.	"Make the online platform as least technical as possible…to make it as engaging as possible."
Low socio-economic groups	• Face-to-face interactions. • Partner with existing and established online communities (e.g. local Facebook pages) to increase reach into the community. • Mobile apps/feedback tools.	"one on one interviews were conducted through a peak body to gather feedback… For many…it was the first time they had engaged…which was a positive experience for both my department and the participants."
Disability groups	• Some groups prefer to engage online. Ensure all content and platforms are accessible. • Involve key stakeholders in testing language and function of tools. • Audio hearing loops at face-to-face events. • Auslan services. • Concierges.	"Tailor messaging and questions to that audience. Not one size fits all. Identifying audiences and understanding how to construct messages that are relevant and meaningful to them."
Youth	• Capacity building programs. • Add value and use meaningful incentives to engage. • Online surveys. • Facebook for promotion. • Meet them where they are. • Gamification.	"The program combined a mix of face-to-face capacity building activities and virtual reality video game development. … Participants enrolled in a course to learn more about working in the disability services sector, but within the course they also contributed to creating a VR game that would help other young people learn more about what it's like to work in the sector. The completed VR video game was then placed with employment providers and presented to young people considering their future career direction"

METRO SOUTH HEALTH CASE STUDY

This case study highlights how an organisation integrated offline and digital methods to engage with a hard to reach group, tailoring the approach to meet the audience's needs and behaviours.

Project: Metro South Health – Mums and Bubs Redesign

Project Objectives: Explore options and alternatives for new Models of Care within the MUMS and BUBS Program, with the aim of designing solutions that meet the needs and expectations of families in the Metro South region.

Engagement Objectives: Connect and engage with local mums/families to ensure the consumer voice informs new MUMS and BUBS Program solution design.

Key Stakeholders: Consumers, community groups, public/ private midwives, public and private hospitals, service providers, GPs.

Engagement Technique: Engaging with consumers (new mums) face-to-face was difficult due to multiple commitments. Innovative engagement methods were required to connect with this target audience.
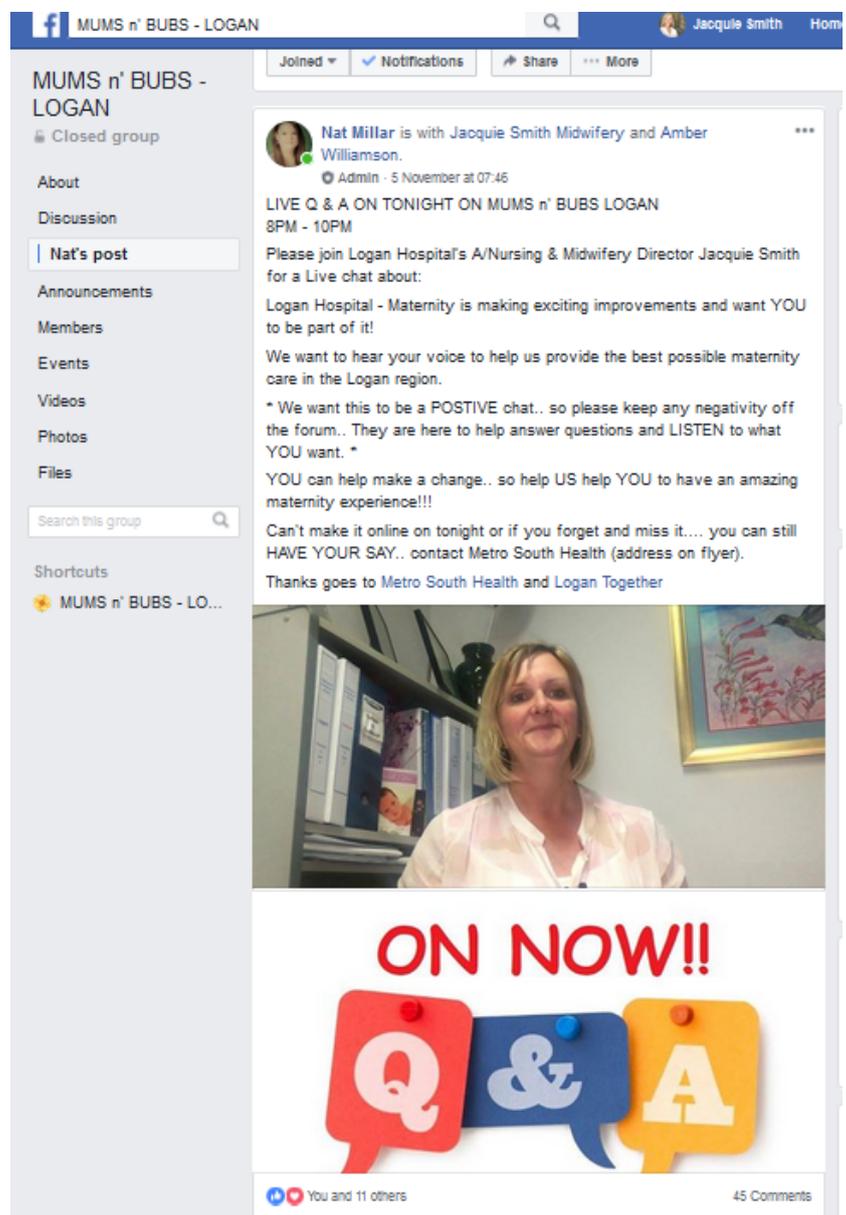
Using consumer insight from Logan Hospitals - Logan Maternity Friends Network, new local Mums (who had accessed Maternity Care over the past 12-24 months) were communicated with to invite participation in engagement activities. Women wanted healthcare providers to engage with them online, after hours. The Metro South Health team formed a strategic partnership with Logan Together and an active Facebook group 'Logan - MUMS and BUBS' (20,500+ members).

They identified an opportunity for a Facebook "Live Chat" session between 8-10 pm, when members were most active.

Facebook comments were entered into the digital platform - Dialogue App whilst the live chat occurred allowing for immediate theming, continued discussion, participation and voting post the Live Chat session.

In addition to the targeted digital consumer engagement, three key stakeholder engagement workshops plus structured group and one-on-one interviews with GP's were held, to ensure a good mix of perspectives and ideas were collected.

Comprehensive feedback was provided to all participants to ensure a transparent engagement process. Finally, a solutions workshop was held to explore new MUMS and BUBS redesign with participants.

Promotion: Extensive campaign material. Social media posts, posters, video.

Results: Over 99 interactions, 45 comments, highlighting 23 key consumer themes.

Relationships with key partners were strengthened, which has led to better outcomes for all participants.

Learnings:
- A risk mitigation log allowed the campaign to run seamlessly. This identified mitigation actions such as a back-up system in case of technical failure and media responses. The team also had the support of the Midwifery Director who featured in the Live Chat. This transparent, engaging and innovative leadership enabled the process to occur.
- Three team members facilitated the discussion to help develop swift responses. At times it was difficult to form responses as the chat moved so quickly. Pre-scripted answers were developed prior to Live Chat. Having the media person present ensured both a professional yet, humorous and personal voice were maintained.
- The Dialogue App enabled theming of comments 'on the go' and allowed visitors to see the themes visually in the app.
- Specialist digital expertise was not necessary. As all platforms were user friendly and simple, they were able to use them with the support of one or two team members with some basic digital expertise.
- The team didn't factor in how long it would take to respond to enquiries they couldn't answer during the Live Chat. Four comments needed to be triaged through the Logan Hospital complaints system to ensure appropriate resolution was achieved.

APPENDIX A: SUMMARY TOOLS LIST

Below is a list of tools that have been used by participants in this research.

| Tools List	Purpose
Airtable	Collaborative spreadsheet/database tool
Basecamp	Collaborative project management tool
Balancing Act	Participatory budgeting tool
Budget Allocator	Participatory budgeting tool
CollabMap	Mapping tool
Collaborative Map	Mapping tool
Consultation Manager	Knowledge sharing platform for stakeholder engagement
Crowdspot	Interactive mapping
CollabMap	Mapping tool
Darzin	Stakeholder management tool
Delib	Online consultation and citizen engagement services
Discord	Voice and text chat app
Discourse (https://www.discourse.org/)	Mapping tool
Engagemap	Interactive mapping
Engagement HQ, Bang the Table	Online consultation and citizen engagement services/software
Engagement Hub	Online discussion software
Eventpoll	Event polling
Facebook	Social media: Informing, discussion, feedback
Future Dialogue	Mobile App for digital community engagement
Groupmap	Online brainstorming and group decision making tool
Harava	Map-based digital community engagement
Idea Scale	Idea gathering software
Instagram	Social media platform - image sharing
ITap	Mobile phone technology
Jotform	Survey tool
Kahoot	Game based learning platform
Konveio	Online engagement on interactive social documents

Tools list continued...

Tools List	Purpose
LinkedIn	Social media - professional network
Loomio	Group decision making tool
Mentimeter	Interactive voting/presentaion tool
Neighbourlytics	Social analytics platform
Open Cities	Website development
Open Social	Online community software
Our Say	Consultation and citizen engagement services
Overflow	Diagramming tool
Padlet	Virtual bulletin board
Place Speak	Place based community engagement platform
Poll everywhere	Audience engagement/feedback tool
Power BI	Interactive visualisation tool
Qualtrix	Experience management software
QuestionPro	Survey software
Skype	Communications app/team collaboration tools
Slack	Team collaboration tool
Slido	Audience interaction tool for meetings, events, conferences
Social Pinpoint	Interactive mapping
Social Playground	Events and activations content creation
Spatial Media	Virtual, augmented and mixed reality experiences
Squarespace	Website software
Stack Exchange	Community powered Q&A sites
Story Maps	Combine maps with text, images and multimendia
Survey Monkey	Survey tool
The Hive	Online consultation and citizen engagement services
Town Hall Social	Voting and particpation app
Twitter	Social media platform
Typeform	Survey tool
Whats app	Social messaging tool
Wordpress	Website software
Yammer	Social media platform - internal networking
YouTube	Social media platform - video sharing
Zappar	Augmented, virtual and mixed reality experiences

APPENDIX B: SELECTION OF DATA

The following charts provide a breakdown of the tools used by organisation types. The top four organisation types by number of respondents have been provided.

Local Government

Chart categories (top to bottom):
- Discussion Forums
- Emerging Tools (Mobile Apps, Gamification, VR)
- Engagement Platform that Hosts a Variety of Tools
- Facebook
- Ideation or Brainstorming
- Instagram
- Interactive Mapping Tools
- Online Surveys
- Online Submissions
- Participatory Tools (e.g. Budgeting)
- Twitter

X-axis: 0%, 25%, 50%, 75%, 100%

Legend:
- Always Use
- Often Use
- Sometimes Use
- Rarely Use
- Never Use

State Government

Legend:
- Always Use (dark blue)
- Often Use (blue)
- Sometimes Use (grey)
- Rarely Use (orange)
- Never Use (red)

Categories (top to bottom):
- Discussion Forums
- Emerging Tools (Mobile Apps, Gamification, VR)
- Engagement Platform that Hosts a Variety of Tools
- Facebook
- Ideation or Brainstorming
- Instagram
- Interactive Mapping Tools
- Online Surveys
- Online Submissions
- Participatory Tools (e.g. Budgeting)
- Twitter

Private / Company

Legend:
- Always Use (dark navy)
- Often Use (blue)
- Sometimes Use (grey)
- Rarely Use (orange)
- Never Use (red)

Individual

Chart categories (top to bottom): Discussion Forums, Emerging Tools (Mobile Apps, Gamification, VR), Engagement Platform that Hosts a Variety of Tools, Facebook, Ideation or Brainstorming, Instagram, Interactive Mapping Tools, Online Surveys, Online Submissions, Participatory Tools (e.g. Budgeting), Twitter

Legend:
- Always Use
- Often Use
- Sometimes Use
- Rarely Use
- Never Use

APPENDIX C SPECIAL THANKS & REFERENCES

SPECIAL THANKS

Many thanks to our case study participants:

- Amber Williamson and Linda De-George Walker, Metro South Health
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- Public Participation Guide: Tools - *https://www.epa.gov/international-cooperation/public-participation-guide-tools*

- Tamarack Institute, Strategies for Inclusive Engagement: Featuring Amy Hubbard - *http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/library/webinar-strategies-inclusive-engagement*