

# Overcoming Boundaries: Using Online Media Tools to Effectively Engage the Public

Planning for public involvement is a key component of any successful public process. Our advice: clearly identify your goals and objectives before identifying any tool, traditional or electronic. Online media offers a “cool” factor - but do not get sucked into a new gadget without consulting your public involvement objective!

## Online media are...

- The ever growing suite of electronic tools available to reach your audience.
- Tools to integrate with traditional activities like public meetings, phone surveys, etc. They are not a substitute for traditional public involvement!

	Boundary	Public Involvement Objective	Solutions
1.	Few site visitors	Get people to your web site Increase awareness and interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include your web addresses on all printed materials (branding)</li> <li>• Optimize site design to improve search results</li> <li>• Leverage existing online media resources such as community and / or related blogs, distribution lists, and web sites</li> <li>• Use measurement tools to track web traffic</li> </ul>
2.	Short attention span	Increase time spent on web site; Educate visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clean design</li> <li>• Use natural eye movement (F-pattern) to drive to important information</li> <li>• Use analytics to create the best user experience</li> </ul>
3.	Distributing and understanding complex information	Make technical information available and understandable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Map key information, users absorb graphical information more efficiently</li> <li>• Provide click through options for easy online viewing</li> <li>• Also consider posting full PDF documents and online document hosting</li> </ul>
4.	Project scale and complexity	Cohesive messaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independent coordinated web sites (for projects involving multiple agencies, jurisdictions, etc.)</li> <li>• Interactive mapping</li> <li>• Electronic newsletters</li> <li>• Online public meetings</li> </ul>
5.	High comment volume, short time frame	Archive, manage and use public input	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online database to capture, archive and analyze extensive public comments (especially useful as participation increases with social media)</li> <li>• Web comment forms</li> </ul>

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6.	High public interest, dense population - Especially with controversial issues	Gather input from many interested parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Online survey (can be open to the public or targeted to specific individuals)</li> <li>Support with printed and phone survey, and make available at public locations</li> </ul>
7.	Project progress not easily visible	Show project progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Photo blogs integrated with existing web sites or using services like Flickr.com or Whrll.com</li> <li>Twitter</li> </ul>
8.	Fast changing project	Keep people interested and informed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Blog reporting providing regular project updates in centralized location</li> <li>Coordinate using services like RSS, Twitter and Facebook</li> </ul>
9.	Printed words can't tell the whole story	Make project accessible and relatable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Documentary videos (professionally produced and incorporated)</li> <li>Personal videos (share real-life examples)</li> <li>Presentation videos (PowerPoint and audio recording)</li> </ul>

Public and Government Sites Using Online Media well	Useful Sites
<a href="http://www.recovery.gov">www.recovery.gov</a>	Analytics - <a href="http://www.google.com/analytics">www.google.com/analytics</a>
<a href="http://www.whitehouse.gov/open/innovations">www.whitehouse.gov/open/innovations</a>	F-pattern - <a href="http://www.useit.com/alertbox/reading_pattern.html">www.useit.com/alertbox/reading_pattern.html</a>
<a href="http://www.psp.wa.gov/flickr.php">www.psp.wa.gov/flickr.php</a>	Photos - <a href="http://www.flickr.com">www.flickr.com</a> , <a href="http://www.picasa.google.com">www.picasa.google.com</a>
<a href="http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/inform/twitter">www.wsdot.wa.gov/inform/twitter</a>	News updates - <a href="http://www.twitter.com">www.twitter.com</a> , <a href="http://www.whrll.com">www.whrll.com</a>
<a href="http://www.soundtransit.org/Sound-Transit-2.xml">www.soundtransit.org/Sound-Transit-2.xml</a>	Social networks - <a href="http://www.facebook.com">www.facebook.com</a>

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