

## Ethelo Decisions: Promotion Tips

Following these tips and advices will ensure that your consultation goes smoothly and that you get the best results in engaging your stakeholders!

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### Use every opportunity to share your consultation

The success of your online consultation depends on how well you promote it. The interactive nature of online tools drives participation once a resident has reached the website; the challenge is getting them there. Here are a few key tips:

- Emailing your lists and any stakeholders' panels with background and link to your budget consultation and asking them to spread the word is an important first step.
- Social media is another key platform for promoting your consultation: almost a quarter of responses come from Facebook. Consider creating a Twitter handle and Facebook account if you don't already have one, and promoting an official hashtag
- Newsletters are another key way to promote your consultation and the benefits of participating
- Consider running a parallel Google Adwords and/or Facebook Ads campaign with keywords to boost online traffic to your consultation website.
- Adding your consultation's URL to your staff's email signature can help get the word out.

### Reach out to local media

In our experience, traffic rates to consultations closely follow mentions in local media, so issuing a press release and getting local coverage is a key avenue to higher participation rates. Announcing a new online consultation at a public meeting, with a corresponding press release, can generate significant local media coverage that will drive traffic to the consultation website. Midway through and towards the end of the consultation period, issuing another press release, announcing the number of participants, which proposals are receiving the most and least support and reminding stakeholders of the approaching deadline, can stimulate a second round of media attention and public participation.

## **“Cross-sell” the consultation (most relevant to municipalities)**

Whether a citizen uses a municipal service or attends a public event, it’s an opportunity to invite them to participate in your consultation. Here are some methods that work:

- A budget page on your website can serve as a clear and easy way to access information on how to take part in the consultation and to access other important dates, reports, and information
- Put up posters and offer information cards at service points,
- Promote the consultation on flyers and notice boards
- Set the default home page on public library computers to the consultation website
- Consider integrating your budget consultation into your larger engagement plans, including online engagement platforms and chat forums
- Train city staff on how to engage residents at public festivals or city engagement events with Wi-Fi enabled iPads and offer an opportunity to complete the consultation there or take home a reminder (button, bookmark). Alternatively, you could staff a table or offer “kiosks” at a public event with opportunities for residents to complete the consultation there.
- Link to the consultation prominently from your Council’s homepage and other popular pages on your website
- End interactions with residents at service counters or over the phone by mentioning the consultation

It’s important to note that many residents will never see your homepage, because they used a search engine to go directly to the waste collection schedule, for example. In that case, it’s a good idea to promote the consultation on your most visited web pages as well.

## **Mobilize existing networks**

You should promote the consultation through your existing networks. Consider promoting your consultation through local non-profit groups, bloggers and community groups and through existing outreach initiatives (newsletters, chat forums, town halls or public meetings). Also:

- Include the consultation in a regular e-newsletter
- Use Facebook and Twitter to regularly remind followers to participate
- Email the list of participants in previous online consultations

## **Incentivize Stakeholders**

Some of our past clients have offered a prize, such as a gift card, from a draw of all participants. Alternatively, you could offer a reward to a randomly selected participant, or the participant who shares the consultation the most.

## **Follow up with Stakeholders**

Following up with stakeholders can be as simple as sharing the results of the consultation at a public meeting, in the paper, and on your website. After a stakeholder participates, send a follow-up email to confirm that their input has been received and will be considered. Explain how the results of the consultation will influence decision-making and mention other opportunities to engage, such as upcoming public meetings. This simple step assures residents that participation is worthwhile; it can strengthen their commitment to the municipality and increase their interest in future consultations.

## **When the consultation is over**

Here are some suggestions from our clients for making the most of Ethelo once the consultation is over:

- Send a follow-up email to participants to let them know how their input was taken into account
- Create a new “engaged stakeholders” newsletter to regularly contact participants about new opportunities to participate and give feedback
- Segment your list according to age, gender, income or location to send targeted messages that are relevant to that group
- Kickstart your next Ethelo consultation by inviting last year’s participants

In this way, Ethelo is not only a consultation tool, but also a way to build relationships with stakeholders, engage them in continuous dialogue and feedback, and increase their satisfaction with, and commitment to, your organization.