

Memo #2: Citizen Engagement

The President and Congress should continue and build upon previous efforts in creating new and innovative ways to use technology to further citizen engagement efforts. While transparency may be a tool to help citizen engagement, it alone does not create the multi-dimensional communications channel needed for engagement. Similarly e-government – using the Internet to improve management and service delivery – does not amount to citizen engagement. Given the explosive growth of mobile devices as well as Internet penetration, there is enormous potential to transform the relationship of governments to the public.

The following represent just some steps and initiatives to foster realistic and dynamic citizen engagement.

1. **Create a new Office for Citizen Engagement Coordination.** There needs to be a central coordination body that works to manage citizen engagement initiatives among agencies and commissions. The Office would also work with public interest groups to better promote the need for improved citizen involvement.
2. **Continue Presidential Directives on Trusted identities.** For citizen engagement to truly work, government and citizens alike must know that postings are from the people who they say they are. Certifying forms of trusted Identities is critical to citizen engagement initiatives.
3. **Develop Clear Guidelines for Agency Online Participation Activities.** Agencies should be asked to document the number and type of online consultation they already conduct.
4. **Continue Experimenting and Fine Tuning Challenge.Gov** Challenge.com was created to seek comments and ideas from the public on various issues. The results to date appear mixed. The site should be re-vamped and made more user-friendly with interactive issues, and buckets where citizens can weigh in and offer advice.
5. **Utilize GIS Postings.** The use of GIS mapping and sharing would be a positive addition to engage citizens. With over 40% of our citizens using “smart phones and mobile devices” picture posting and information posting is an excellent tool to encourage citizen engagement, as was nicely demonstrated by recovery.gov.
6. **Experiment with Ad-Hoc Communities.** Citizen engagement initiatives should be structured so they can be meaningfully unstructured. In other words the Federal government should establish a “Rapid Ad Hoc Response System” where mechanisms can be created almost instantly in times of crisis and also in times when a certain issue surfaces that could benefit from citizen engagement techniques.
7. **Promote Collective Intelligence.** Similar to Ad-hoc Communities, Collective Intelligence is a concept that identifies experts or opinion leaders in a particular field or area of expertise and can be called upon to help solve specific challenges and problems.
8. **Utilize Wikis.** Wikis can be useful mechanism for building knowledge, sharing ideas, and engaging informed citizens;
9. **Ensure that Agency Staff have Adequate Skills to Support Online Participation/Promote Crowdsourcing.** Leaders can gain valuable input to the development of policies and priorities by seeking broad input. This can also increase citizen understanding and support for government action. Agencies should assess the training status of their staff that is responsible for conducting public participation activities. Public participation training should be mandated across the federal workforce and include various levels/formats to meet the needs of new hires, middle managers, and SES employees.