

CAPITAL REGIONAL DISTRICT

PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE CONSULTATION

WHO

The Capital Regional District used Ethelo to consult citizens in a contested decision around building a new wastewater treatment facility

GOAL

To foster transparency in the process of gauging sentiment and levels of public support for six potential locations for the new facility

HOW

Ethelo collected votes and comments in a seamless way, enabling citizens to evaluate trade-offs and cast their vote based on relevant information related to each potential location

OUTCOME

A transparent results panel, shortlisting the two potential locations with the highest public approval

The Capital Regional District of British Columbia, Canada used Ethelo to bring full-transparency to an heated decision around the location for a wastewater treatment plant. Local citizens and governing bodies needed to resolve the diversity of needs of tax-payers, activists, and municipal administrators. After evaluating 6 potential locations and different technologies, the CRD screened out locations with low public acceptance, narrowing down on one general site.

OVERVIEW

Residents of the Eastside of the Capital Regional District (CRD) of British Columbia were asked to provide feedback about a number of development strategies for a wastewater treatment new plant, and also to evaluate 6 different siting/technology options.

BACKGROUND

As part of the Eastside Community Dialogues (www.crd.bc.ca/eastside), the CRD had consulted the public asking for input in sewage treatment and recovery solutions for 3 local municipalities. Using online surveys, in person conversations and write-in commentary, the CRD was able to: set priorities; identify performance criteria; and review possible site-areas that have been brought forward by the municipalities of Oak Bay, Saanich and Victoria.

A total of 6 siting areas emerged as priorities; however, ongoing public dissonance required the CRD to extend a transparent voting conversation to the broader public. The CRD also required narrowing down from 6 to 2 sites, which would then receive a more granular technical analysis. Ethelo was identified as the platform that would attain these two requirements.

THE CHALLENGE

The question of where to locate a controversial waste treatment facility, and what kind of technology would work best excited a significant amount of community discussion and resistance. The CRD had learned that townhalls can attract vocal groups with specific interests who may not represent the average citizen's needs. In-person meetings could not necessarily be conducive to everyone's input being considered equally. Such a process could lead to a "group-think" with difficulties in implementation success down the road.

There was therefore a significant need for a broad-ranging, inclusive process that more easily incorporated a broad range of input from seniors, busy professionals, the physically handicapped, single parents and youth. Beyond the ballot box or the open house, the challenge of the engagement was to guarantee the inclusion of thousands of citizens spread across multiple locations.

APPROACH

In this engagement, citizens first completed a standard survey used to gather demographic information and other data. Then, participants used the Ethelo r ν to "to engage in a structured and social process of evaluating and shortlisting options.

ACCESIBLE INFORMATION

The Ethelo platform was used to provide participants with significant information, including maps as well as engineering background and potential technologies, for each of the six facility options.

CRITERIA-BASED EVALUATION AND DIALOGUE

The six potential locations for the new facility were evaluated against two overall criteria: "siting" and "performance". Each of these locations had several factors associated, such as: uses, number of treatment facilities, kilometers of new piping, etc. (Fig. 1).

Citizens were able to consider these trade-offs as they scored each site against the two criteria.. The six areas were presented in random to each user, to guarantee greater objectivity. In addition to quantitative criteria-based

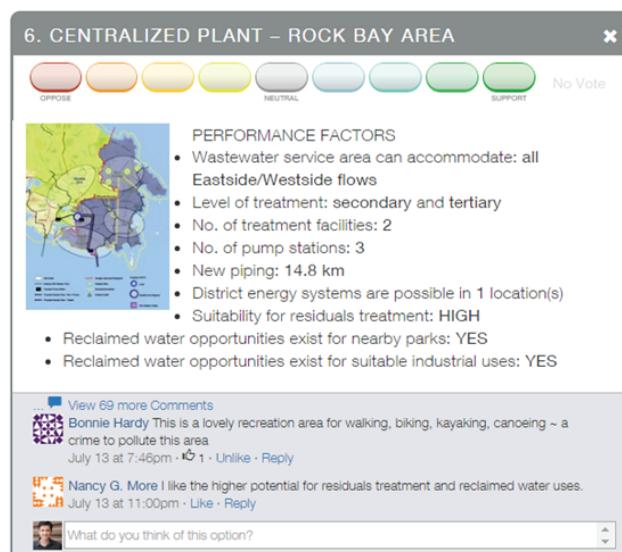


Figure 1. Rating and social dialogue box for one of the six configurations, with expandable pop-up image and bullet-point outlines of relevant trade-offs

evaluations, participants were also able to comment and respond to comments on the locations. This attracted significant dialogue as people responded and liked each other's contributions.

I have never worked with a public engagement tool like Ethelo before and I am pleased to have had the opportunity. You and your team was very helpful and I appreciate the long nights I imagine you had to spend to make this happen.

Kristin Quayle, Communications Coordinator, CRD

ENSURING ACCURACY

Due to the controversial nature of the project, and the real property interests of many participants, the CRD also needed to ensure confidence that the results could not be compromised by some participants voting multiple times, and similar sources of bias.

Ethelo achieved this confidence by a process of “passive authentication.” Participant information was tracked by asking the public for their unique email address in order to sign up and/or log in. This was only part of the process however. In order to arrive at accurate results by avoiding false or double votes, Ethelo ran the final data through a filtering process. This included applying the following criteria, which flagged (and eventually eliminated) suspect votes;

- **IP address** – signifies the user’s Internet provider. Ethelo collected this for every visit to the site
- **Fingerprint** – unique identifier for a single computer or device. Ethelo collected this for every visit to the site
- **Vote Pattern** – weight assigned to all options and issues
- **Survey Pattern** – answers given on survey, not including Postal Code and Prize

“High risk” submissions were defined as submissions flagged with two or more filtering

criteria. These high-risk submissions were not considered in the final results. Hence a total of 56 votes were filtered out, representing 5.1% of the original vote population. The filtered results were also compared against the non-filtered results. The preferred location remained the same before and after the filtering (i.e., Centralized Plant – Rock Bay Area).

RESULTS

GRANULAR EVALUATION

Each citizen had the opportunity to assess the potential locations according to both siting and performance criteria, and then weight those criteria to identify their personal top choice (Fig. 3). Ethelo aggregated this information using several analytic techniques to identify for decision-makers which path of action would receive the strongest “strength of support”.

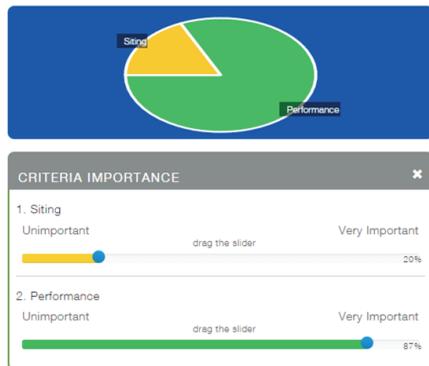


Figure 2. Sliding bars allowing each citizen to express their priorities in a more granular manner

HIGH ENGAGEMENT

More than 1,000 people voted and/or commented over a three week period, providing almost 1,100 comments and significant insight and clarity into public sentiment. 292 citizens contributed a total of 787 comments on the 6 areas under evaluation, averaging 131 comments per area.

In addition, 309 general comments were registered through the general feedback panels, out of which 27 (9%) dealt directly with Ethelo platform’s functionality – either positively (6; 22%), critically (9; 33%), or asking/adding clarification or making a technical suggestion (12; 45%). The remaining comments pertained

to the wastewater treatment situation itself, predominantly around issues of costing, siting, treatments levels, and the overall consultation process. Overall, the high completion rates (84%) show that Ethelo was an effective conduit for socializing and interpreting citizen opinions.

The participants’ engagement level varied according to age-groups and municipalities. People older than 55, and those responding from districts in the municipality of Victoria, demonstrated the highest levels of participation (Fig. 3).

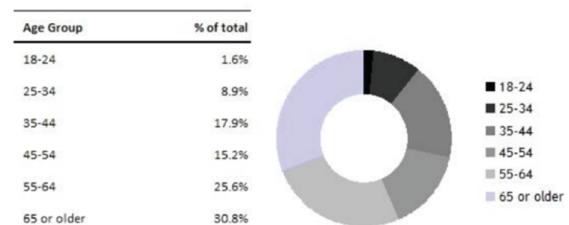


Figure 3. Breakdown of participants according to age group

FULL TRANSPARENCY

The CRD wanted citizens to experience a fully-transparent process from start to finish. Besides the social media discussion around each option and criteria (Fig. 2), the final results were open to the public (Fig. 4). This allowed participants to have a clear sense of the overall public sentiment around each of the six proposed solutions. In turn, Ethelo’s ‘strength score’ reflected the depth and breadth of collective support for a given scenario; which is based on two variables:

- **support** – the overall level of support that participants will feel for a scenario
- **unanimity** – how evenly that support is distributed: scenarios that will polarize people receive a low unanimity rating

A LEARNING OPPORTUNITY

The CRD was on a tight deadline, leaving little time to pilot test the platform. This represented a major learning opportunity for Ethelo, allowing our team to receive public feedback on issues such as: perceived lack of anonymity when providing emails; importance of re-framing/clarifying the language of the landing page; amount of information to make a decision (too much, or too little); forced choices in some survey questions; taking more than the 3-5 minutes specified in the landing page; etc. These issues were addressed directly, and resolved or clarified within 1 or 2 working days.

NEXT STEPS

The Ethelo engagement was only one stage of a multi-stage decision-making process. The two locations identified by Ethelo as having the highest 'strength of support' were sent for review by the the CRD's Waste Management Committee, and then sent to an independent panel of experts for a detailed costing and engineering analysis. The results of that independent review were published in September 2016.

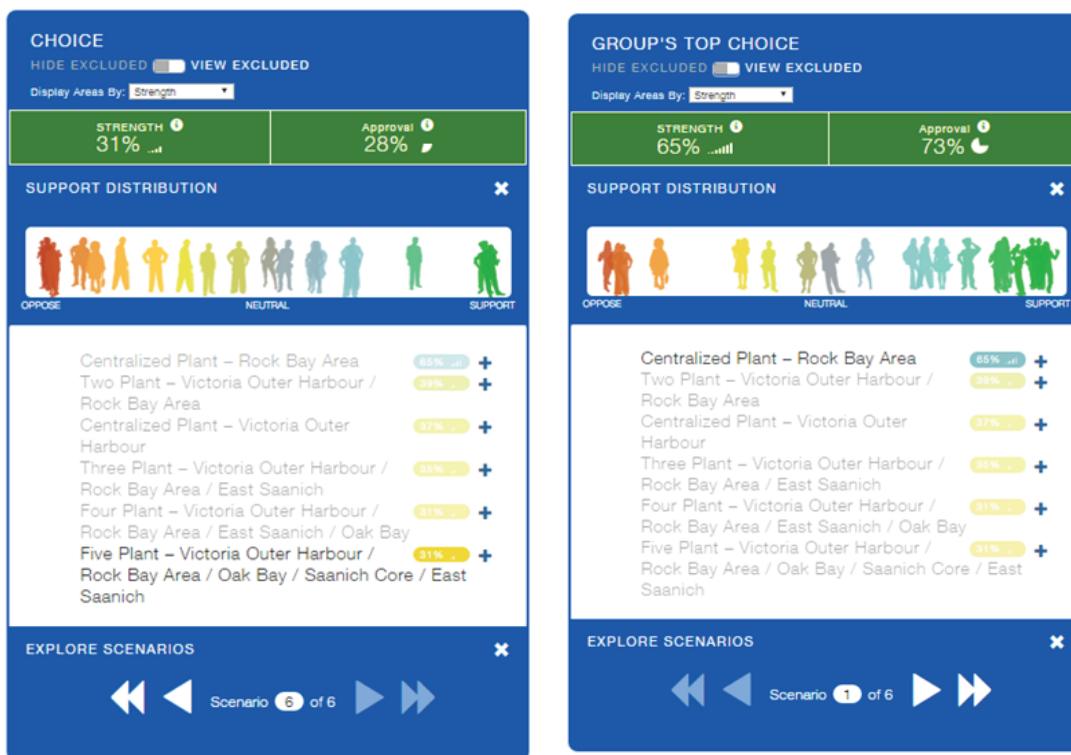


Figure 4. A numeric and visual distribution of public support, in this case contrasting the least and most popular areas