



## OPERATIONAL PLAN

# Improving Oakland Digital Engagement Through Public Participation

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper introduces a four-stage operational plan for the creation and deployment of a digital engagement platform called People Powered Policy, which aims to help community members in Oakland, California more easily provide input on policy decisions made by the Oakland City Council.

Centered around specific high-priority policy areas such as housing and public safety, this digital engagement platform uses a concept called crowdsourcing to collect input and shape policy at the local level. Crowdsourcing is a way to aggregate information, thoughts, ideas, or insights about a topic from a “crowd,” a large group of people. In this instance, the platform would collect existing conversations and feeds found on popular social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Next Door, and present them to policymakers in a clear way. The platform also would educate affected communities about what is happening within the City around priority areas. Moreover, the platform would allow residents to give direct thoughts, ask questions, and share stories that create a direct line to councilmembers.

This platform would meet residents where they are already sharing and engaging on social media,

*Thank you to our project mentor: Mai-Ling Garcia, Current Head of Digital Strategy & Engagement, City of San Francisco; Former Digital Engagement Officer, City of Oakland, CA*

while also soliciting their input on specific policy areas. Of note, this platform would not accept unsolicited comments from residents. For that, we would direct residents to request information from or engage with their councilmember.

We envision that the platform will have two views: the Community view and the City view. The Community view will:

- ▶ Inform users about what is already being done on a policy area, including key past/upcoming legislation and upcoming events that they might want to attend;
- ▶ Capture public social media feeds from the community focused on key policy areas; Create and collect responses from polls to synthesize insights from the community on issues of importance;
- ▶ Enable residents to add thoughts, questions, and stories to story banks focused on these same policy areas; and
- ▶ Transparently share feeds from existing social media and newly created data with the public.

The City view shows all the findings from the community inputs and other sources, all in one convenient place. It:

- ▶ Shows current social media feeds from verified residents on specific topic areas;
- ▶ Reports on public sentiment from polls given to residents. For example, a question asked on the Community view can indicate which percentage of participants support, oppose, or are neutral on a topic area;
- ▶ Features stories, thoughts, and questions from the community on the topic area;
- ▶ Showcases recent community reports that touch upon the policy area; and
- ▶ Reports call center data that shows inbound calls and needs from the community.

See Appendix 1 for a mockup of both of these views and suggested submission forms.

We anticipate that this plan would be implemented and funded by a working group composed of members of the Digital Engagement Team, the Race and Equity Team, and other people throughout the City government, along with 2–3 community members. The output would be made publicly available as open-source software.

## COST AND TIME ESTIMATES

We believe that the minimum proof of concept could be prepared in three months by one part-time product manager and one developer. Our rough estimate for the entire plan is one year, plus ongoing part-time work between developers, project managers, and support staff. We estimate costs would be minimal, as we would be partnering with community organizations to complete the project. Much of the timing will depend on obtaining approval within the City, establishing working group standards, and cross-organizational collaboration.

## POTENTIAL PARTNERS

We anticipate that the platform can be created through one or a combination of the following:

- ▶ Partnering with OpenOakland: The Code for America Brigade, OpenOakland, can be a key partner for this platform by developing an open-source option over several months and testing the platform with users in the field.
- ▶ Creation of a no- to low-cost request for proposals (RFP): The City of Oakland has some outstanding technical professionals who could lend their skills through a no- to low-cost request for proposals (RFP) where the city can partner with these professionals. This type of process has been used for other platforms, notably to stand up and manage the prizes and challenges website Challenge.gov. Our team would work with the City of Oakland team to write the RFP and source proposals to ensure proper execution of the platform.

To test the proof of concept during the initial phase, we recommend partnering with existing community-based organizations and advocacy groups within a specific geographic area of East Oakland. We recommend tapping into the planning work currently being undertaken by the East Oakland Neighborhoods Initiative.

Possible East Oakland community partners include:

- ▶ Tech Equity Collaborative
- ▶ Acta Non Verba: Youth Urban Farm Project
- ▶ Brower/Dellums Institute for Sustainable Policy Studies
- ▶ Communities for a Better Environment
- ▶ East Oakland Building Healthy Communities

- ▶ Higher Ground Neighborhood Development Corporation
- ▶ HOPE Collaborative
- ▶ Local Clean Energy Alliance
- ▶ Oakland Climate Action Coalition
- ▶ Original Scraper Bike Team
- ▶ Planting Justice
- ▶ Sobrante Park Resident Action Council
- ▶ East Oakland Collective
- ▶ Roots Community Health Center
- ▶ Youth Uprising

## DETAILED PLAN

### Stage 1: Build Open-Source Proof of Concept

In this stage, we recommend the City of Oakland appoint a small, part-time working group composed of members of the City and community to oversee the creation of the platform. The working group will create an open-source proof of concept with Open Oakland designers and developers to execute on the idea.

This first version of the platform should at a minimum have both the Community and City views and should:

- ▶ Capture and show content from selected social media feeds;
- ▶ Collect and process sentiment from communities (from text or online polls); and
- ▶ Source and collect thoughts and questions in Online Forums from target communities.

Resources:

- ▶ City Team: Part-time (PT) membership from one member of the Digital Engagement and Information Technology teams
- ▶ Open Oakland/RFP Team: 1 PT Product Manager; 1 PT Developer
- ▶ Time: Three months

### **Stage 2: Choose One Policy Area and Test Minimum Viable Product in East Oakland; Create Beta Version of Site and Reporting**

After the first version of the platform (alpha) is available, the working group should choose one policy area about which they want solicited input (i.e., housing or public safety), and test it with residents in East Oakland. Through this process, the working group would collect feedback from within the website and via a survey or interviews to learn about how the site is performing.

After feedback is collected, the team should incorporate community feedback to add new functionality to the platform. During this phase, the team can also build out deeper sentiment analysis or artificial intelligence functions, produce editorial stories to be featured on the platform, and create a reporting function to send a summary to the appropriate councilmember via email.

Resources:

- ▶ City Team: Part-time (PT) membership from one member of the Digital Engagement and Information Technology teams,
- ▶ Open Oakland/RFP Team: 1 PT Product Manager; 1 PT Developer
- ▶ Time: Six months

### **Stage 3: Select Three Policy Areas and Test Beta Site with East Oakland**

After the beta site is complete, the working group should decide on three more policy areas for the site (one from the community, and two chosen by the City). The working group would work with selected community organizations to collect stories, thoughts, and questions about these policy areas. On a weekly basis, reports would be sent to councilmembers.

During this stage, the working group should create a draft governance plan to manage and update the site on an ongoing basis. They should use the draft plan to govern in advance of Stage 4 and to iron out any challenges that might arise.

Resources:

- ▶ City Team: PT membership from one member of the Digital Engagement and Information Technology teams
- ▶ Open Oakland/RFP Team: 1 PT Product Manager; 1 PT Developer
- ▶ Time: Six months

**Stage 4: Fully Operational; Incorporate Feedback on Platform and Change as Needed**

During this stage, the website will have been tested, improved upon, and become fully operational such that all Oakland residents can participate. The site can segment the content by district and neighborhood, giving each councilmember a custom view of insights from their district. It is at this stage that Oaklanders can also submit unsolicited thoughts and questions to specific council members through the site, in addition to giving solicited input on policy priorities.

A key necessary feature is the ability to collect feedback from users so that the site and the process can improve over time.

Resources:

- ▶ City Team: PT membership from one member of the Digital Engagement team
- ▶ Open Oakland/RFP Team: 1 PT Product Manager; 1 PT Developer
- ▶ Time: Ongoing

APPENDIX 1: PEOPLE POWERED POLICY MOCKUPS

Community Topic View



**Topic/Theme**

Important policy topic or theme in the city or community. Includes follow, like and share buttons

**Understand**

Materials, links, and current events to educate residents on topic areas

**Engage**

Post a thought, question, submit a story or take a poll on topic area.

**Explore**

Community feed with user-generated stories, thoughts, and questions

### Question or Thought Topic View

The screenshot shows a web interface for submitting a question or thought. At the top left is the 'PPP' logo. To the right are navigation links: 'TOPICS' (highlighted in yellow), 'PARTNER', and 'ABOUT'. Below this is a horizontal menu with categories: 'Housing' (highlighted), 'Education', 'Transit', 'Criminal Justice', 'Public Health', 'Parks', and 'Permits'. The main heading is 'Housing / Community View'. A paragraph of text defines housing policy: 'Housing policy refers to the actions of the government, including legislation and program delivery, which have a direct or indirect impact on housing supply and availability, housing standards, and urban planning.' Below the text are three icons: 'FOLLOW', a heart, and a share icon. A dark blue bar contains the text 'Submit A Thought or Question'. The form fields include: 'Name:' with a text input; 'Your Message:' with a text input; 'Part of Oakland:' with a dropdown menu; and 'District:' with a dropdown menu. A large text area is positioned to the right of the dropdowns. At the bottom center is a green 'SUBMIT' button.



### Story Topic View

**PPP** TOPICS PARTNER ABOUT

Housing Education Transit Criminal Justice Public Health Parks Permits

#### Housing / Community View

Housing policy refers to the actions of the government, including legislation and program delivery, which have a direct or indirect impact on housing supply and availability, housing standards, and urban planning.

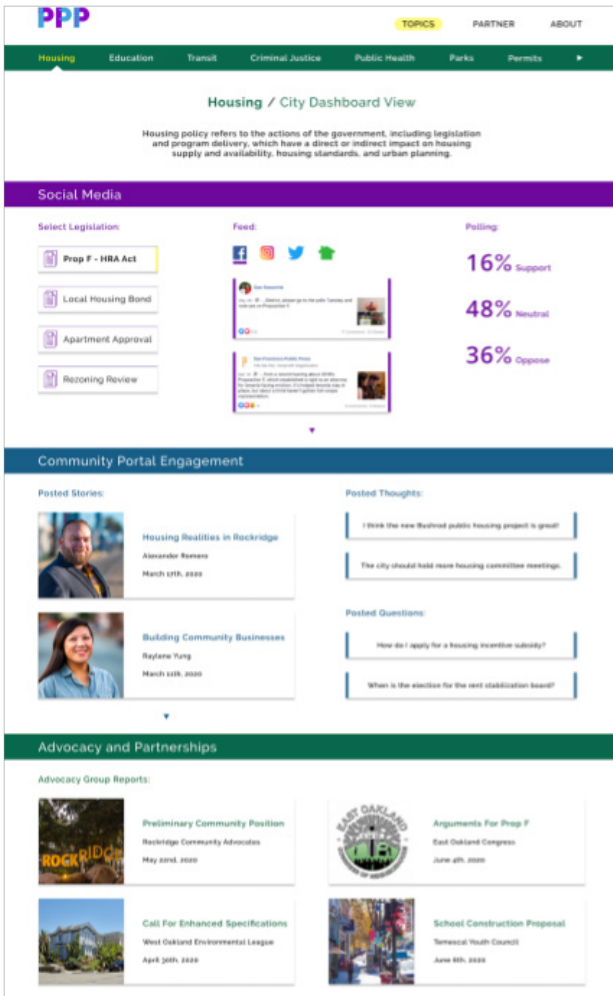
FOLLOW

#### Submit A Story

Name:	<input type="text"/>	Title:	<input type="text"/>
Part of Oakland:	<input type="text"/>	Your Story:	<input type="text"/>
District:	<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>
Email:	<input type="text"/>		
Story Topic:	<input type="text"/>	Photo / Video URL:	<input type="text"/>
This is my work:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input type="text"/>
Send me policy writing tips:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Notes:	<input type="text"/>

**SUBMIT**

City Dashboard Topic View



**Topic/Theme**

Important policy topic or theme in the city or community.

**Social Media**

Recent legislation, social media feed, and polling sentiment analysis so city and Council know real time resident thoughts

**Community Portal**

View stories, thoughts, and questions, residents posted on this topic area

**Explore**

Explore the reports, relevant data and research on this topic area by community organizations and advocacy organizations