

# COLLABORATION TOOLS TO SUPPORT INFORMED PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

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## 1 ABSTRACT

*New public engagement methods are increasingly geared toward discourse, collaboration, and interaction that emphasize: providing understandable yet credible information targeted to the audience; integrating data and visualizations; employing experiential and interactive modes of engagement; and collaborative design. Active engagement through hands-on workshops increases the diversity of viewpoints and groups participating and can improve learning and buy-in for final solutions. Digital planning support tools enable concurrent “live” consideration of multivariate and interdependent information, including marrying geo-spatial information with social processes and empirical metrics. But many such tools intended to meet these needs are expert-intensive, forcing the public to be passive consumers. A new generation of digital tools puts users in the driver seat and enables interaction and collaboration. We report on a user study that tested one such user-driven system, designed to engage the public in collaborative urban design exercises, against a traditional paper-based workspace. University students from various disciplines served as surrogates for the public in an exercise of designing a walkable neighborhood center. Pre- and post-surveys, group debriefing interviews, and video-taping provided detailed data about group processes, interactions and experiences. We found that the single workspace for co-design, clearly defined work task, evidence-based feedback and tactile nature of both workspaces contributed to active engagement and collaboration. The digital system provided deeper information with better visualizations, and enabled a different collaborative process, but both workspaces were rated as engaging by participants, which may suggest that both paper and digital engagement tools have a valuable place in public engagement workshops.*

### 1.1 Keywords

public engagement; visualization; digital engagement tools, co-design