CASE STUDY

PublicInput + VB

# Citywide Public Engagement Success

## Virginia Beach engages 20,000+ residents on projects big and small

**The Question:**

How can consistent and proactive communications increase interest in the public participation process?

### Communication is key

The Communications Office for the City of Virginia Beach oversees external communications while also serving as an in-house creative firm. The team works with every department in the city to some degree: from writing to special events to public engagement, the website, and social media.
In 2018-19, the Communications Office used software to engage the community on::

- Planning the city's long-term goals and priorities
- An economic development project to redevelop a city-owned site
- Comprehensive planning for the city's Entertainment District
- A community art project in a local park
- Disaster relief following a hurricane

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# Reaching more residents by combining virtual and traditional public engagement tactics

### Meeting resident where they are with "mixed-mode engagement"

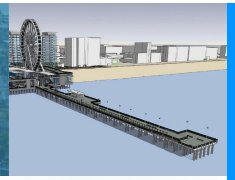
Using a blend of virtual and traditional tactics has been proven to increase engagement because residents have more opportunities to engage in the format that is familiar or most accessible to them. By reaching the broader community, Virginia Beach can be certain that their public engagement will be meaningful in the final decision-making process.

### How did Virginia Beach reach and engage residents?

- Email newsletter
- Social media
- Public meetings
- Engagement hub on website that lists all projects
- News releases with links to engagement pages

### More public engagement doesn't have to mean more work

Virginia Beach has been collecting record-breaking public engagement data — and thanks to automated analysis and reporting, can quickly understand public sentiment while saving time and effort.



**Entertainment District Project**
2.5K Participants
50K+ Responses & Comments

**Dome Site Project**
2.5K Participants
60K+ Responses & Comments

**2019 Planning & Beyond**
2.2K Participants
115K+ Responses & Comments

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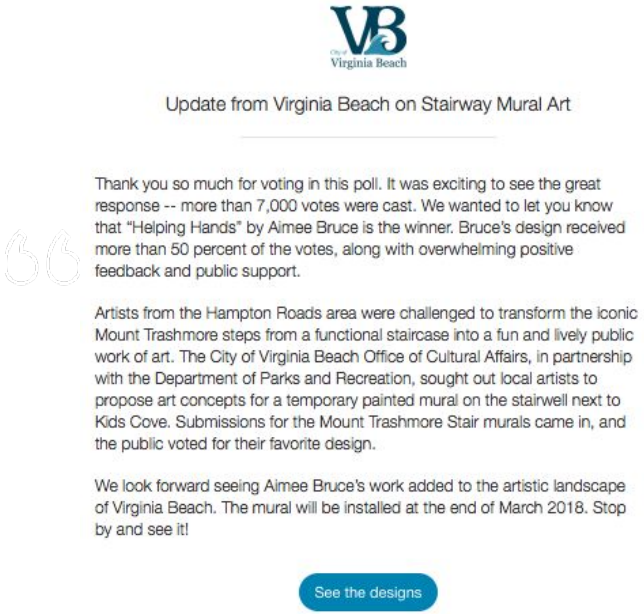
# Building a Resident Database creates opportunities for re-engagement

## The benefits of automated, organized resident data

By connecting surveys with a Resident Database in the Public Communications Cloud, Virginia Beach is able to automatically sort residents by project, then follow up with updates and results.




## Creating relationships with two-way communication

**CRM Database:** To store resident contact information and participation history

**Project Email Management:** Separate email addresses for projects, but all stored in the same place

**Custom Resident Segments:** For sorting residents by location, demographic, and projects for more specific outreach

Virginia Beach's ability to close the feedback loop has created a continuous cycle of engagement - this email had **a unique open rate of 57%**.

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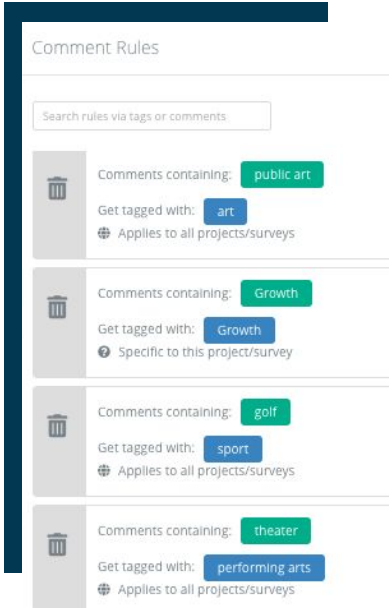
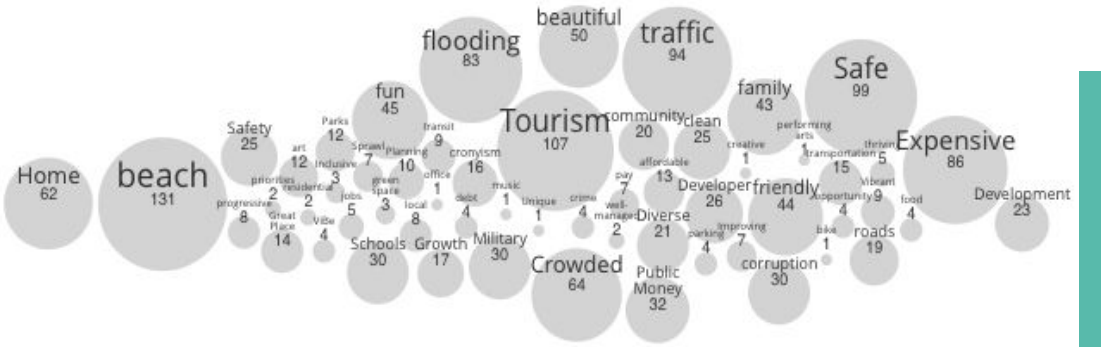
# Capturing data that tells a clear story

**Assessing public sentiment with dynamic questions and comment analysis** helps Virginia Beach better understand resident preferences. Comment tagging and sentiment analysis contribute to making data-driven decisions.




When you think about a place you'd really want to live, how important are each of the following to you? A place that. . .

| | 1 - Not at all important | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 - Very Important |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Has quality, affordable housing options | 4%<br>1 - Not at all important | 9%<br>2 | 24%<br>3 | 33%<br>4 | 30%<br>5 - Very Important |
| Has good stormwater and flood control infrastructure | 1%<br>1 - Not at all important | 3%<br>2 | 11%<br>3 | 25%<br>4 | 61%<br>5 - Very Important |

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# Damage Reporting After Hurricane Florence Using Social Media Outreach

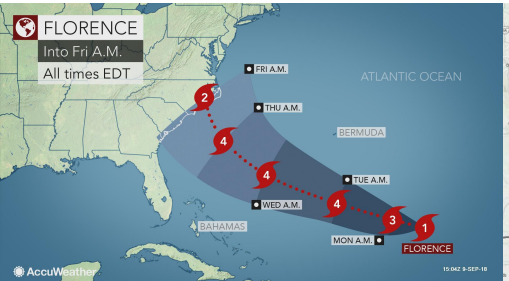
## Reaching rural populations for disaster relief

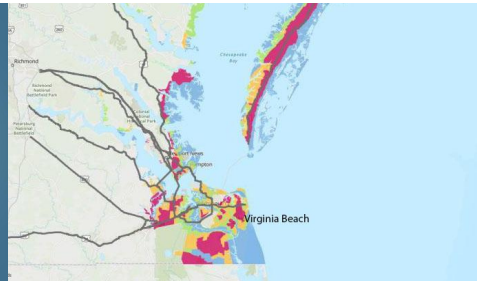
Virginia Beach is in an area highly susceptible to hurricane damage - even when not directly hit. After Hurricane Florence in 2018, flood damage became a common theme of social media chatter amongst rural residents in the City's tidal area. However, the City didn't really know the degree of magnitude:

Was there water in residents' homes? Did people have to evacuate?

A survey was distributed by:

- Posting on the City Website
- A local newsletter
- An in-person public meeting with a digital component
- Neighborhood-specific outreach on NextDoor




Promoting the survey link on NextDoor proved to be especially effective: Virginia Beach has one of the most robust NextDoor networks in the country with approximately 1 in 5 residents on the social media platform.

Virginia Beach leaned not just on its own NextDoor presence, but also had help from residents. Locals to the area who were admins of the site's neighborhood groups posted the survey, and so too did the council member who represents that area.

In the five days following the hurricane, Virginia Beach received 1,000 points of public input from 100 respondents in the affected area.

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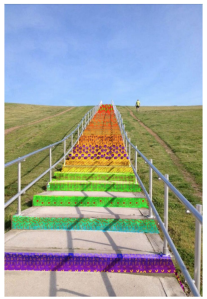
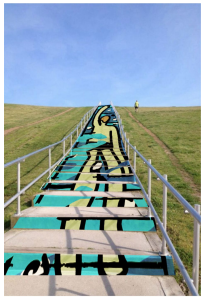
# Lowering the barrier to participation with relevancy, visuals, and mobility

Reaching and engaging residents on simple projects is one way to build relationships, start conversations, and build a CRM of resident contacts. With public input data and contact information in one place, government organizations don't have to start from scratch on each new project.

Take for example, Mount Trashmore – a wonderful example landfill reuse and a unique public space in Virginia Beach composed of two man-made mountains, two lakes, picnic areas, a Kids' Cove playground, and a massive public skatepark.

Virginia Beach's Cultural Affairs Office wanted to continue placemaking efforts by hiring a local artist to paint a staircase mural. After the Cultural Affairs Office chose three potential options, a public engagement page was used to collect feedback. The mobile-friendly website, which used rendered photos of the three options to illustrate what the final project would look like, had 7,300 participants. It also provided a great way to collect resident contacts: over 2,483 people subscribed to email updates from the city.





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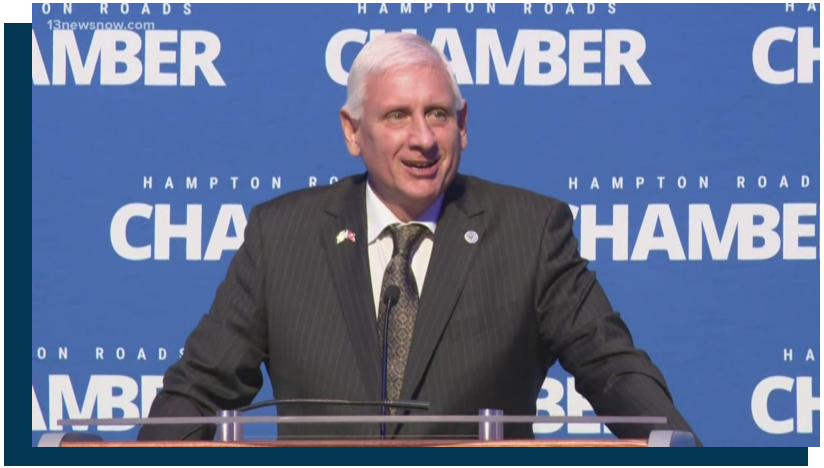
# Reaching the broader community increases public participation and public trust

> 20,000 participants have provided nearly 275,000 responses on topics ranging from elements they want to see in the Dome Site project, what murals should be painted on the steps of Mount Trashmore, to what the city's priorities should be in the future.
>
> — **Bobby Dyer**, Mayor of Virginia Beach




## The Takeaway

**A Better Community Engagement Process**

Virginia Beach was able to plan for and respond to the needs of its residents by using a mixed-mode approach to engagement. With PublicInput your team is supported through every step of that process.

SEE IT LIVE