SOLUTION IDENTIFICATION

METHOD: ONLINE BRAINSTORMING
PARTICIPATORY TASK: IDEAS/PROPOSALS

DECIDE MADRID

KEY TAKEAWAYS

✴ Economic crisis, mass protests and widespread feelings of politicians not listening to people's concerns, motivated activist-turned-politician, Pablo Soto, to become a co-founder of Decide Madrid in 2015.

✴ The platform, maintained by the Madrid City Council, comprises two parts: participatory budgeting and proposals.

✴ The Participatory Budgeting component allows people to propose and vote on projects to be funded.

✴ The Proposals feature enables anyone to submit a proposal to change policies or regulations of the Madrid City Council. .

✴ Proposals that receive the supporting signatures of 1% of the population of Madrid must be considered by the Council.

✴ The platform has 400,000 registered users and now allocates €100 million/year to participatory budgeting. However, none of the proposals made through the website have advanced to become law because of the high threshold for signatures.

✴ Decide Madrid is built using open source software and has been replicated in 70+ cities using the same technology for public engagement.

Pros:

▸ The potential to have real impact is high and many people have signed up.

▸ Great design makes it easy to create and upload a proposal.

▸ Participatory budgeting feature works well and has led to successful outcomes for the City.

Cons:

▸ The law requires excessive number of supporting signatures and prohibits politicians or staff from responding to proposals.

▸ Proposals feature does not offer guidance as to what constitutes an actionable proposal, leading to lower quality submissions.

BACKGROUND

Decide Madrid was established against a backdrop of widespread civil discontent and mass protests against post-GFC austerity measures in Spain. This discontent boiled over in May 2011 with the emergence of a group of web-based activists, the Indignados ("outraged") social movement.

In subsequent years, the champions behind the Indignados movement began to find their way into positions of power, replacing the traditional and more bureaucratic politicians. Pablo Soto was one of these and is now a City Council member in the Area of Citizen Participation, Transparency, and Open Government. In 2015, he became a co-founder of Decide Madrid, which aims to enable members of the public to directly shape policy and regulations, and to increase the transparency of City Council actions generally.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

At the heart of Decide Madrid is the ability for people to create and submit a "citizen proposal" for new regulations, policies or actions to be adopted by the City Council of Madrid. The process for creating and considering proposals moves through **four basic steps**:

Step 1 - Submitting a citizen proposal
People wishing to make a proposal through the Decide Madrid website must first register by providing, as a minimum, their email address. Registered users can then create a "citizen proposal" comprised of:

- Title
- Summary (max 200 characters)
- Proposal text (no limit)
- Link to external video
- Link to additional documentation
- Descriptive image
- Additional documents (max of 3, must be PDFs)
- Scope of operation (select a neighborhood or entire city)
- Place marker on map to represent scope (if applicable)
- Tags
- Full name of person submitting proposal (not displayed publicly)

Ideas can be submitted via the website, by mail or in person. To assist people to develop sound proposals, a resource kit and blog post with guidelines and tips are provided.

Step 2 - Public voting (first round)

Once a proposal is submitted, anyone with a verified account can click a button expressing their support for the proposal. Each proposal is given twelve months to gather the public support needed for it to progress to the next phase of consideration. The minimum level of support needed is expressed as 1% of registered citizens in Madrid over 16 years of age (currently ~27,000 people). If a proposal does not reach this threshold, it is moved to the "archived" section after 12 months.

Proposals are available to view on the site and sorted by "most active," "highest rated," "newest," and "archived" (can no longer receive support), or by tags such as culture, mobility, and social rights.

To maximize citizen participation and accommodate those without internet access, most actions that take place on the website (including registration) can also be done in one of Madrid's 26 Citizen Assistance Offices with the help of trained staff. Beyond listing on the website, those who submit proposals are responsible for publicizing them, allowing the City Council to retain a neutral position on any given proposal.

Step 3 - Public discussion and public voting (second round)

Once a proposal reaches the 1% threshold a 45-day period of online public discussion is triggered. This period is followed by a seven-day period when verified users over 16 years of age can vote to accept or reject the proposal. A majority vote in this process allows the proposal to move to the next stage - consideration by the City Council.

Step 4 - City Council consideration

Any proposal that wins majority favor in the second round of public voting must be reviewed by the City Council within 30 days. During this 30 days, the Council evaluates the proposal based on its legality, feasibility, competence, and economic cost, all of which are set out in a subsequent report that is openly published. If the report is positive, a plan of action is written and published to carry out the proposal. If the report is negative, the City Council may either propose an alternative action or publish the reasons that prevent the proposal's execution.

Technology in use

Decide Madrid is hosted on a website and uses the open source software Consul created by the Madrid City Council, which now serves as the foundation for similar initiatives by over 70 cities and regional governments.

Outreach activities

▸ How are people informed about the opportunity to participate?

Other key features

In addition to submitting proposals, Decide Madrid enables the public to:

▸ Decide how a portion of the City's budget is distributed among different projects (participatory budgeting)
▸ Debate topics of concern and share ideas (including voting on ideas) that can then be adapted into citizen proposals or participatory budgeting projects
▸ Participate in the drafting and modification of regulations, ordinances, guidelines, etc. before they are implemented.

Impact

Decide Madrid has found immense success in levels of citizen participation, aggregating nearly 400,000 registered users who collectively have submitted more than 21,000 proposals. The City Council has also used consultations to take action on 38 decisions made through direct voting, and now allocates €100 million/year to participatory budgeting processes. Placing every part of the process in full view of the public and providing a link to an open data repository has helped meet the goal of promoting transparency within the government.

However, according to a report from ParticipaLab, Decide Madrid still confronts two main challenges:

1. It is too difficult for any given proposal to gather enough signatures to reach the 1% threshold (to date, only 2 have reached this threshold).

2. Many proposals put forth by citizens are poorly informed and designed in such a way that prevents their implementation because they are not under the jurisdiction of the City or they duplicate another law that already exists.