

BRIEFING NOTE: Decide Madrid

decide.madrid.es

Method

Online Brainstorming



Participatory Task

Ideas



Owner: Madrid City Council

Location: Madrid, Spain

Years in Operation: 2015–present

Implementation Level: Local

Platforms: Web, offline

How does it work?

Decide Madrid is a citizen participation platform launched in 2015 that, amongst other features, allows members of the public to submit proposals to the City Council.

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” of any length in text and/or video. Citizen proposals can be submitted via the website, by mail, or in person. To assist people in developing sound proposals, a resource kit and blog post with guidelines and tips are provided.

Once a proposal is submitted, any registered and verified resident of Madrid can click a button expressing support for a proposal. Once posted, each proposal is given twelve months to gather the public support needed for it to progress to the next phase of consideration. In order to advance to the next stage, a given proposal must receive the support of at least 1% of registered citizens in Madrid over 16 years of age (currently ~27,000 people) – this is a legal requirement that stems from Spanish law. If, after 12 months, a proposal does not reach this threshold, it is moved to the “archived” section of the website.

Proposals can be sorted by “most active,” “highest rated,” “newest,” and “archived,” or by category 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 completed in one of Madrid’s 26 Citizen Assistance Offices with the help of trained staff.

If a proposal reaches the 1% threshold, a 45-day period of online public discussion is triggered. This period is followed by an additional seven-day period when verified users 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.

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 to carry out the proposal is subsequently written by City Council staff and published. If the report is negative, the City Council may either propose an alternative action, or publish the reasons that prevent the proposal’s execution.

What are the outcomes?

Decide is a mixed success. On the one hand, it offers an efficient mechanism for any member of the public to engage in democratic life and the free software that it utilizes is in use in 70+ cities. In Madrid, nearly 400,000 people are signed up and have submitted over 21,000 proposals. On the other hand, the legal requirement to obtain one percent of the population’s signatures (only two proposals have ever garnered the required support) before a proposal can move forward, combined with a number of design flaws, have resulted in thousands of proposals being submitted but none being enacted since the platform’s inception. Also many proposals put forth by citizens are poorly informed and designed in such a way that prevents their implementation, often because they are not under the jurisdiction of the City or they duplicate another law that already exists. The City of Madrid is seeking to test new ways to increase the number of signatures on citizen-submitted proposals while simultaneously improving their quality.

What does it cost?

The software is free and open source and developed by a community of volunteers. The City Council, however, pays for a staff member to focus on public engagement as his/her job.

What are the benefits?

- The clear and straightforward process make it easy to sign up and submit a proposal or vote on someone else's.
- In-person citizen assistance venues ensure that everyone - regardless of their ability to access the internet - is included.
- Registration and verification ensure that only Madrilenians participate.
- Even if the City Council cannot officially engage citizens on the platform, it can still see what people are talking about and care about.

What are the risks?

- The absence of a sample proposal or guiding questions means there is a lack of guidance as to what constitutes an actionable proposal, leading to lower quality submissions.
- The inability of elected officials or staff to engage with citizen proposals means proposals that could otherwise have been developed into something implementable receive no feedback.
- The volume of proposals is very high, which limits participants' ability to see many of them - as a result, many high quality proposals may go unnoticed.

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