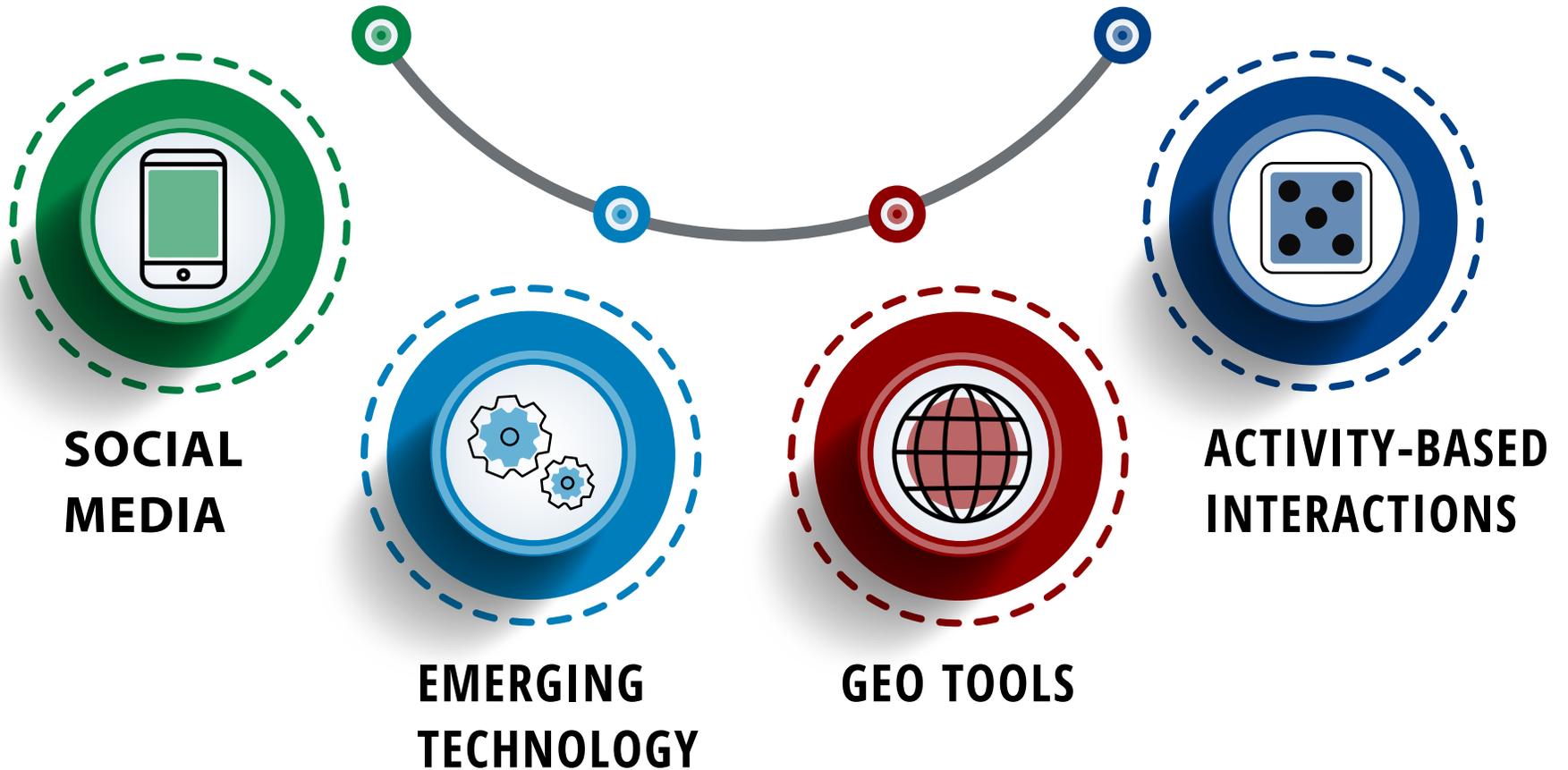


# EMERGING PRACTICES IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



# SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media provides agencies with a low-cost option to engage with local communities in an informal and personalized way.

## KEY INFORMATION

Social media platforms are useful for garnering real-time feedback from the public through comments, shares, and likes.

Crucial to stay up-to-date with emerging platforms.

## EMERGING PLATFORMS

Instagram Threads:

An Instagram feature that allows users to create text-based posts and engage in real-time discussion and updates, similar to X.

Allows users to create posts with up to 500 characters and the option to link images and videos.

Instagram Reels:

A short-form video content section of Instagram where users can create videos and share to a broad audience.

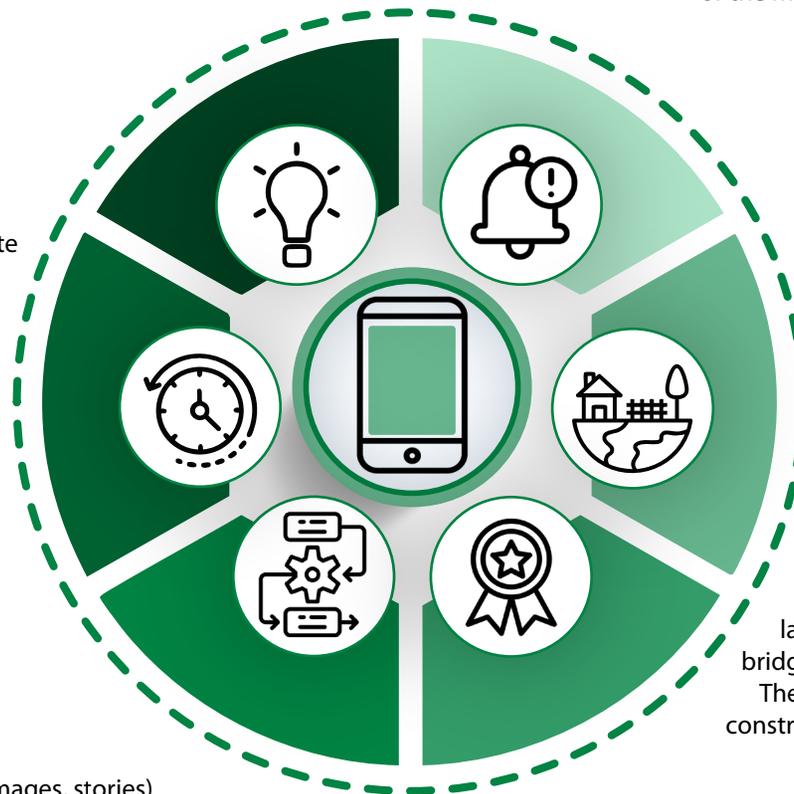
## CHANGING ALGORITHMS

Many algorithms have changed.

Use a mix of formats (e.g., videos, polls, text, images, stories) to stay visible in feeds.

Understand the platform that is being utilized in terms of which types of content are prioritized.

Likes, shares, comments, and DMs, replays and shares all count towards engagement.



## MONITORING

Monitor the success of posts on different platforms.

This includes likes, shares and comments.

If public feedback is observed to be negative or the message is being misconstrued or misinterpreted, consider making another post aimed at clarifying the messaging.

Reminder, it is not Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) policy to respond to social media comments.

## RURAL ENGAGEMENT

Social media use is especially beneficial to reach rural communities by facilitating more engagement. It helps bridge gaps through the promotion of engagement in discussions, and provides a low-cost mechanism to share information and resources.

## SUCCESS STORY

The Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) launched a campaign across Instagram regarding bridge safety and demolition in the Summer of 2024. The purpose of this campaign was to communicate construction updates and information with the public, in a way that was "memorable" and "fun".

The campaign content consisted of videos, creation of BridgeFest concert merch, and other graphics to effectively communicate complex infrastructure work. Over the course of the campaign, the UDOT Instagram received 429,663 likes over the course of 35 posts in two months.

# EMERGING TECHNOLOGY

Emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and virtual reality are transforming how agencies engage with the public and present complex information.

## TOOLS

**Artificial Intelligence (AI):**  
Software applications and systems that utilize machine learning and algorithms to perform tasks at a more efficient rate than humans.

**Virtual Reality (VR):**  
Technological tools that create interactive and immersive 3D environments for the purpose of increasing visualization components.

**Augmented Reality (AR):**  
Software tools that overlay digital content with the real world to create an immersive environment that enhances user interaction.

## AI FOR ENGAGEMENT

AI Chatbots can be trained to provide responses and answers to user inquiries. AI can also summarize and sort through public comment, especially when a project has large volumes of feedback. AI can also identify trends in collected data.

## VIRTUAL REALITY

VR can be used for visualization of design concepts.

VR can help create 3D, interactive simulations that showcase proposed projects for better comprehension of complex projects. VR also aids the public in assessing potential impacts of a project.

## AUGMENTED REALITY

AR enhances real-world environments by overlaying digital elements, allowing users to visualize proposed changes within their actual surroundings. This can help the public better understand design concepts and how projects will impact their communities in context.

## HOW TO DESIGN A VR WALKTHROUGH

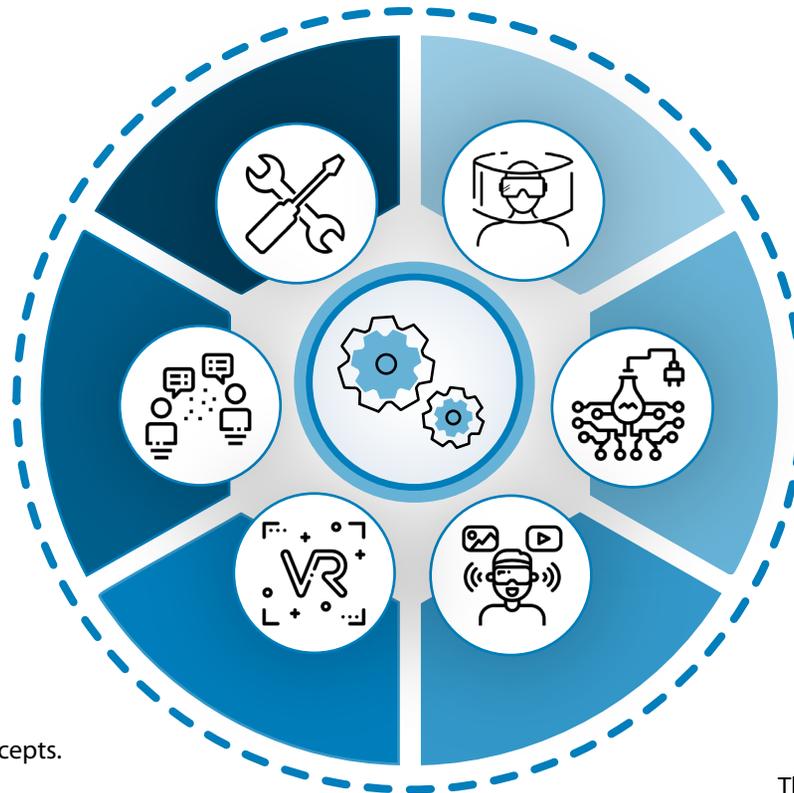
To design and create a VR walkthrough, first **define the objective and purpose**. Then, **determine and select user-friendly software** like Unity or Unreal Engine. **Develop a 3D model and map out paths and routes** for users to navigate in the virtual space. Then, **integrate interactive features** like clickable points that provide information to promote engagement. Lastly, **export the model** to VR format for deployment.

## CONSIDERATIONS

These technologies may be more costly than other engagement methods.

This is crucial to understand when deciding when these tools are appropriate for use.

Consider using AR and VR strategies for projects that may receive much negative feedback from the public to promote enhanced visualization and understanding.



# GEO TOOLS

Geo tools offer location-based strategies that can enhance outreach and engagement by delivering targeted and up-to-date content to specific geographic areas.

## CONSIDERATIONS

Boosts overall participation rates, especially for those who may be disconnected from traditional outreach methods.

These tools also improve efficiency of targeted messaging.

Although they may have higher costs associated with start-up, the public is much more likely to receive and open the message.

## GEOFENCING

A digital outreach tool that sends messages to digital devices that have entered a specific geographic boundary using technology like Global Positioning Systems (GPS), WiFi, and cellular data services.

## BLUETOOTH BEACONS

A digital outreach tool that uses Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) protocols to send messages and/or content to Bluetooth-enabled devices when they have entered a geographic boundary. (GeoPlugin, 2024.)

## GEOTARGETING

A digital tool that uses location information to deliver content and engage a targeted user. This tool uses the user's IP address and GPS location services.

## OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT USE

Use of these tools shares and promotes project-related content and information for people who live or regularly travel through these locations.

These tools are ideal for communicating the following types of updates:

- Construction updates
- Road closures
- Traffic pattern changes
- Safety campaigns
- Surveying

## SUCCESS STORY

Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA), CA, used geofencing as a major outreach strategy for their I-405 Improvement Project. Project-related content, and advertisements were digitally sent to residents and businesses within the affected geographic boundary. These targeted alerts were dispersed to over 100,000 mobile apps reaching a broad audience of users. Due to this strategy, engagement metrics were reported to have passed the industry's averages by around 30%.



# ACTIVITY-BASED INTERACTIONS

Activity-based engagement strategies foster meaningful public participation by making it more interactive and increasing community ownership.

## KEY INFORMATION

These engagement strategies encourage public participation by engaging stakeholders interactively through different formats.

Although these strategies may not be “new” they are often not widely integrated into the public outreach process.

## POP-UPS

Pop-ups are an innovative way to meet the public where they are. Pop-ups can be in the form of tents and tables at events like farmers markets and festivals or can be hosted by the agency.

They can be used to distribute information or can be more participatory involving surveys or activities.

## “PRETTY” COMMITTEES - PROJECT AESTHETICS

These are informal advisory groups often composed of local residents, artists, or community leaders who help shape the aesthetic and cultural elements of a project.

These groups have a valuable role in guiding visual design, signage, landscaping, or place-making features that reflect local character.

This can increase community ownership of a given project.



## BUDGET PREFERENCE EXERCISES

Allows for citizens to “shop” for desired transportation improvements.

Residents prioritize their desired changes and agencies can then tailor transportation decisions based on the community’s needs.

This approach allows the agency to set the parameters, including the “budget” and the options provided to residents.

## GAME-BASED ENGAGEMENT

The utilization of game-like content in public meetings to engage community members through informal education practices. This may include game pieces, role playing, or art materials

This approach makes complex planning concepts more approachable and can increase participation by appealing to a broader audience, including groups that are younger or less familiar with the topic.

## SUCCESS STORY:

In 2019, Bayview, California, in conjunction with the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA), launched a participatory budgeting process to inform their Community Based Transportation Plan.

In this exercise, residents submitted project ideas and voted on existing project proposals to determine what should be funded.

This community engagement process showcases how interactive tools and exercises can hold influence over transportation decisions.