

GoTriangle builds trust, wins grant funding with unified public engagement

GoTriangle unifies public engagement to scale up efforts and make more representative decisions



It's as simple as the community said it, so we did it. That's what we try to do with our community input: this is what you said you wanted, so we brought it to you.

—Juan Carlos Erickson

Director of Communications and Community Engagement



? The Question: How can you collect and analyze data in a meaningful way to inform decision making?

Unifying all public engagement into one place

Public transit planning has become a priority in Wake County, North Carolina: the population density is expected to increase 31% over the course of 10 years. Public engagement is a must to ensure the best decisions are made for current and future ridership.

GoTriangle was able to find public engagement success by diversifying their tactics and unifying all their efforts to reach and engage a larger, more representative population project-over-project.



Unifying public engagement throughout project stages increases project awareness and participation



Increasing participation and public trust every step of the way

GoTriangle combines all engagement into one place, resulting in:

- Reaching the broader community from the onset of their projects
- Filling in demographic gaps through targeted advertising
- Lowering barriers to entry for public participation
- Seeing the full picture, regardless of how residents choose to engage
- Acting quickly to show residents' voices are heard
- Closing the loop with a Communications Cloud connected to a Resident Database.
- Building internal trust, community trust, and to win grant funding

Engagement by the numbers*

55,554

SURVEY RESPONSES

34,131

REACHED ON SOCIAL MEDIA

945

EMAIL SUBSCRIBERS

700

TOOK FOLLOW-UP SURVEY

Combining virtual and traditional public engagement tactics from day one



Our public engagement strategy at the beginning was a matter of educating the community on what their community investment is, how important their participation is, and what we're doing.



Online designed to complement offline

GoTriangle leads a large team of partners in the public outreach efforts for the Wake Transit Plan's implementation, working to create materials and messaging that break down complex technical components of a multi-year plan that involves bus, bus rapid transit and commuter rail service. At the start, engagement aimed to inform the public about the Wake Transit Plan and provide the general framework for the community's investment in transit. The first phase of outreach also asked people to weigh in on priorities for the bus network.

Understanding the geography of participation

The second phase of outreach greatly expanded the level of engagement and involved more than 30 events across Wake County. Festivals, community meetings, board meetings, nonprofit events and pop-ups at transit centers, combined with traditional public meetings and online engagement, doubled the number of opportunities for residents to participate in shaping their community investment in transit. Working with community organizations to reach people also helped to build trust and inform outreach to be more effective.



From outreach, to data, to results, GoTriangle was now able to tell a clear story—both internally and to the public—to close the feedback loop and create trust.





We can push public involvement messages and surveys to specific pockets, and that has been very important when we try to make sure we close the gap.



After understanding public need and rolling out an action plan, Erickson's team took another critical step: they let community members know what they did with the responses they received. **The draft transit plan was released to the public and sent to project participants.** According to recent studies, this follow-up is [the biggest predictor of increased public trust](#).

Virtual tactics that work hand-in-hand with in-person outreach are key to ensuring a long-term plan has broad, consistent reach across all communities. Surveys that range from simple comment requests to complex route mapping questions embed seamlessly into existing websites and circulate online with accompanying custom graphics.

Recognizing that technology and mobility have changed residents' expectations for communication, GoTriangle took to using targeted social media advertising and PublicInput's news media integrations to reach residents on their computers and mobile devices. Through PublicInput's integrations, GoTriangle was able to place **geo-targeted survey ads** on the local NBC affiliate website (WRAL.com), Facebook, and Univision to increase their reach and engage Spanish-speaking residents.

"When we targeted a section of North Raleigh where we know Hispanics live, we saw immediate success," said Juan Carlos. "We had 25 Hispanic participants in the first push alone."



What does the community say [they want], and what can we do to show people that we are putting their money to work?



Re-engaging residents to build data & win grant funding

With a public engagement process now in place, GoTriangle was able to more quickly engage the public on follow up topics.



We have a task in the Wake Transit Plan for a major investment study to determine where bus rapid transit should be in the county, and also to determine the details of a possible commuter rail.



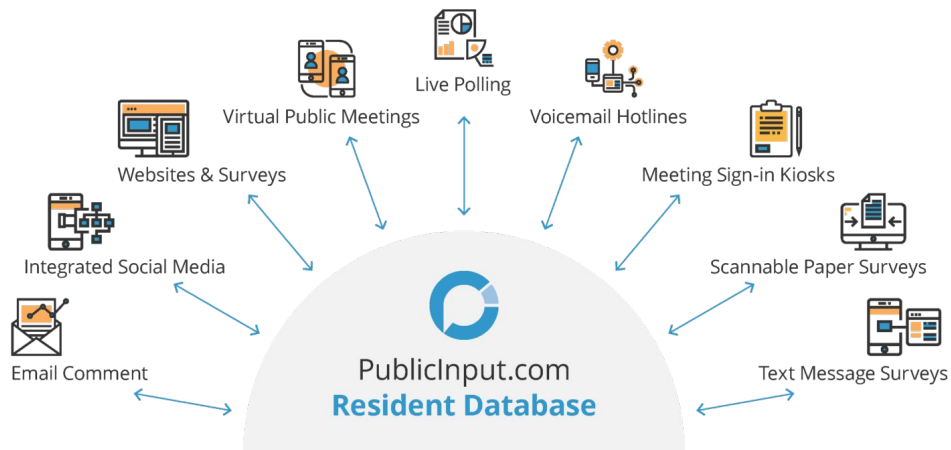
To fulfill this aspect of the plan, Juan Carlos's team launched a follow-up survey to re-engage residents in the decisions about BRT and commuter rail. That follow-up survey would go on to receive 700 responses. **Those responses proved critical for something bigger: grant funding.**

Prior to using PublicInput to engage residents, GoTriangle had applied for grants for clean technologies like electric buses. With only word-of-mouth proof of public support, the grant was initially denied. Now armed with solid data, GoTriangle re-applied for the clean tech grant.

"Then we were able to get the grant," said Juan Carlos, who pointed to quantified public interest in the technology as critical to securing the funding. GoTriangle debuted its first electric bus in January, 2020.



The Takeaway



UNIFY ALL PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT INTO ONE PLACE

Juan Carlos and the GoTriangle team overcame common public engagement hurdles by connecting key engagement processes in one place to see the complete picture.

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