

Welcome to
AMHERST
massachusetts

Local Gov Digital Engagement: Pandemic & Beyond

→ Challenges & Opportunities



TOWN OF AMHERST, MA | BRIANNA SUNRYD



Brianna Sunryd, MPP
Town of Amherst, MA
Communications Manager
Community Participation Officer
Town Manager's Office & IT

- **10 years in municipal technology and communications**
- **ICMA Digital Strategies Advisory Board**
- **National Center for Digital Government Fellow**
- **StatNet Steering Committee**
- **& more**





About Amherst

- **Pop. 39,924**
- **Council-Manager Government since December 2018**
- **Home to UMass Amherst, Amherst College & Hampshire College**
- **Households w/ a computer 96.6%**
- **Households w/ internet subscription 91.2%**
- **Persons in poverty: 27.5%**

Source: American Community Survey, 2019

Updated Charter and New Form of Government



Increased focus on participation & engagement

Amherst's new Charter called for focus on increased community participation

Community Participation Officers (3) appointed from existing staff

Amherst continues to build capacity & strategy in these areas

Some of our existing tools

In use pre-COVID



Social media channels



In person meetings & events



Newsletters & subscriptions



Websites



Surveys & more...





Enter COVID

How do we bring people together when we need to stay apart?

Rapid need to:

- Increase info & communications
- Pivot to remote virtual meetings
- Enable a remote/hybrid workforce
- Move services online
- Provision for engagement as well!



Taking the in person, online

- Council meetings
- District meetings
- Weekly community chats
- Town Manager monthly coffees
- Town Manager office hours
- Special events, celebrations
- & more



TOWN OF AMHERST COMMUNITY CHAT



Join us for a Live Chat w/ Q&A
Every Thursday @ Noon

TOWN MANAGER OFFICE HOURS



Friday, January 29th 9am-10am
Amherst Town Manager Paul Bockelman



Some safe, in-person engagement

Lucky enough to have had
a small amount of safe,
outdoor but in-person
community connections



Amherst Ambassadors – knock and
talks, farmer's market



Tabling at food distribution sites



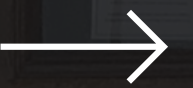
Tabling for Census



Tabling at flu clinics



Outdoor mask distributions



Increased engagement with public meetings

01

Everything Recorded

50+ hours per week of meetings recorded and posted, all boards

vs. Pre-Covid average of 8 hours per week & only 4 boards

02

Video Access

Our YouTube channel video views increased by **487%** compared to the same time last year

03

Real Time Attendance

Live attendance has gone up exponentially at board and committee meetings



Digital Info Signs

Use for Engagement

In addition to sharing out updates and other local information...

Use signs to ask questions and poll community members w/ text in option

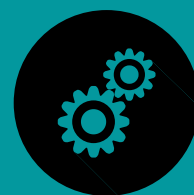
Share surveys and project initiatives



CARES Funded



New Tool



**Powered by
Soofa**



Public Participation Platform

Engage Amherst

Complete suite of listening, information, analysis, reporting and relationship management features online

Mix and match precisely the right online tools for community objectives, such as Council goals, building projects & more



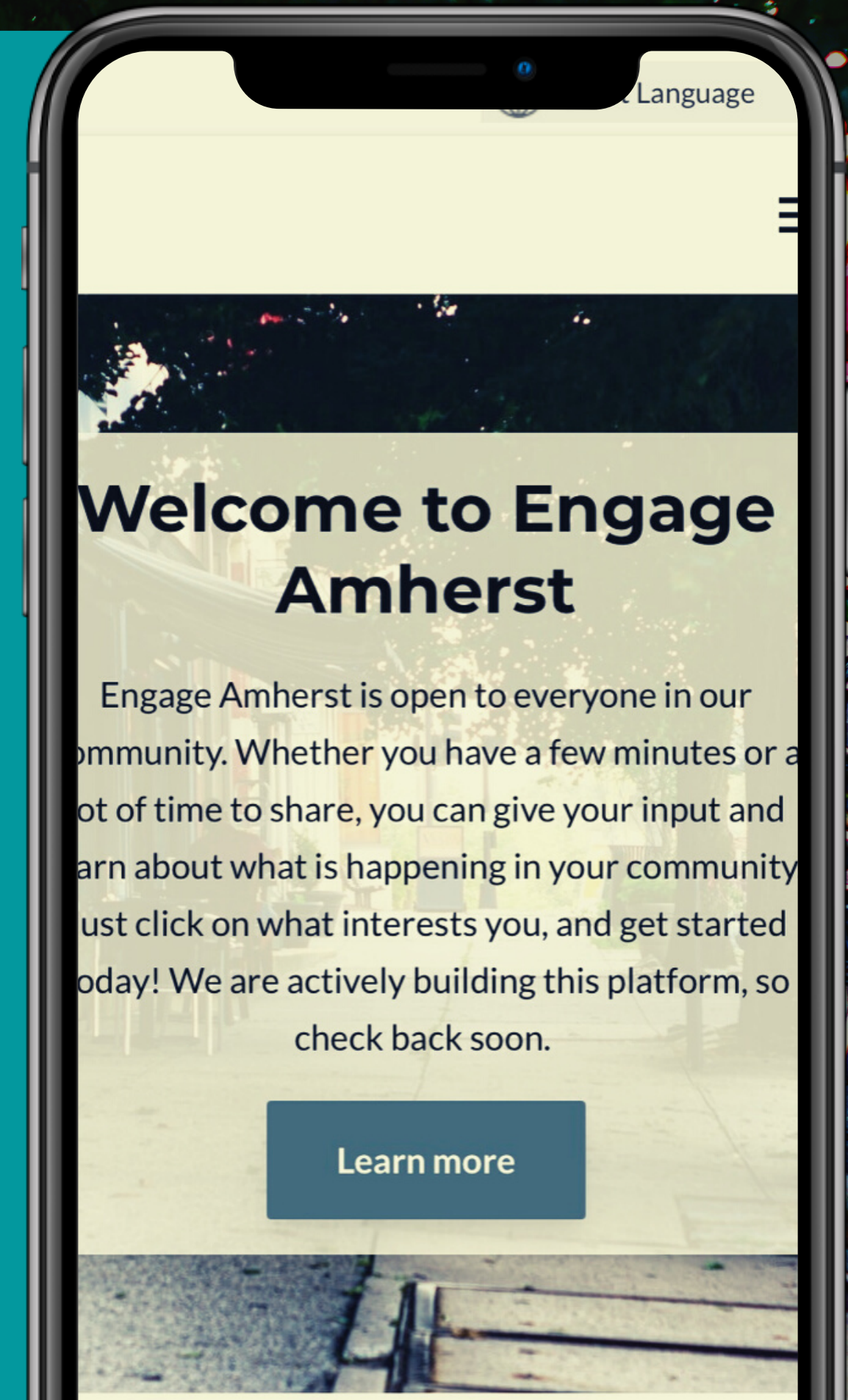
CARES Funded

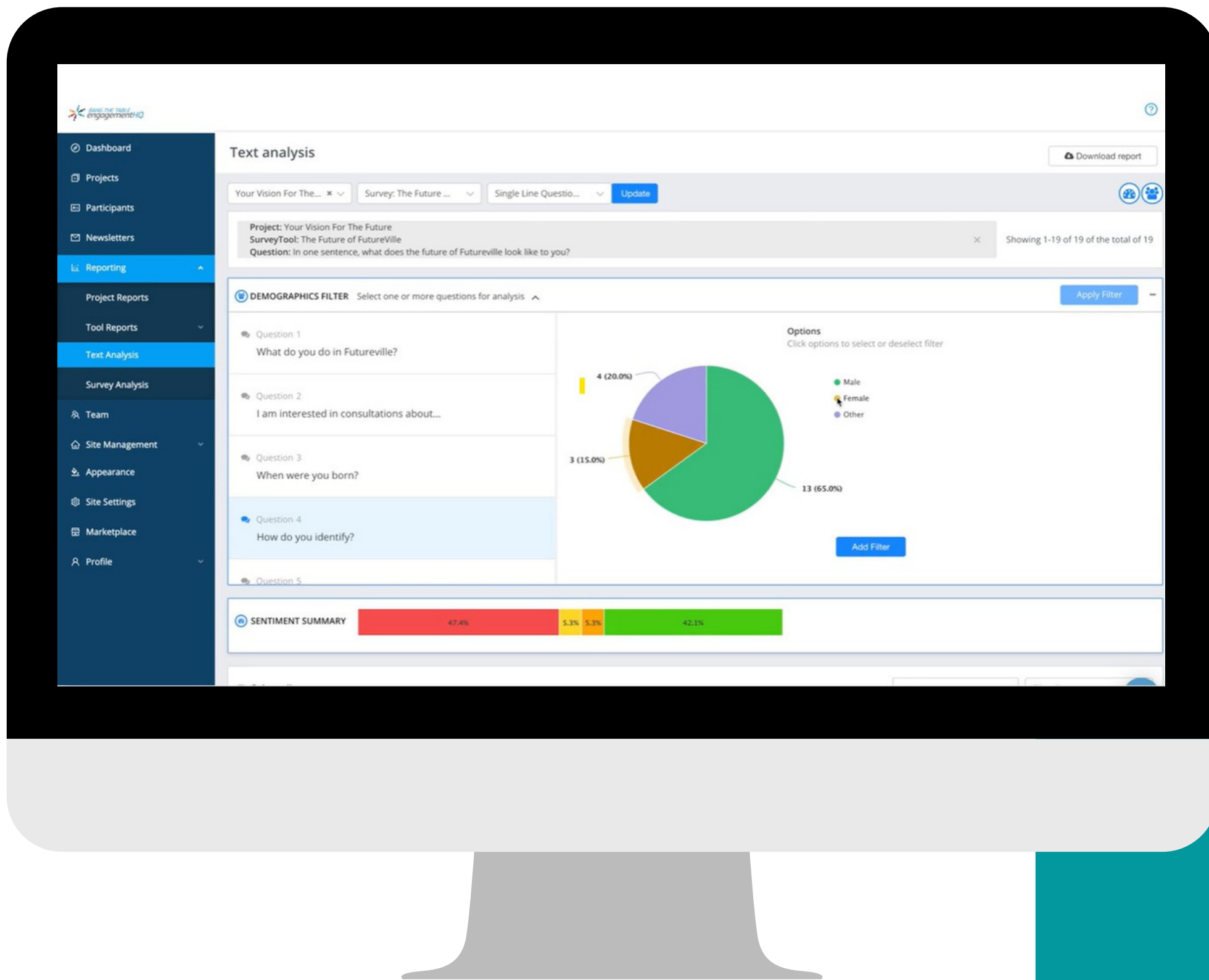


New Tool



**Powered by
Bang the Table**





More on platform...

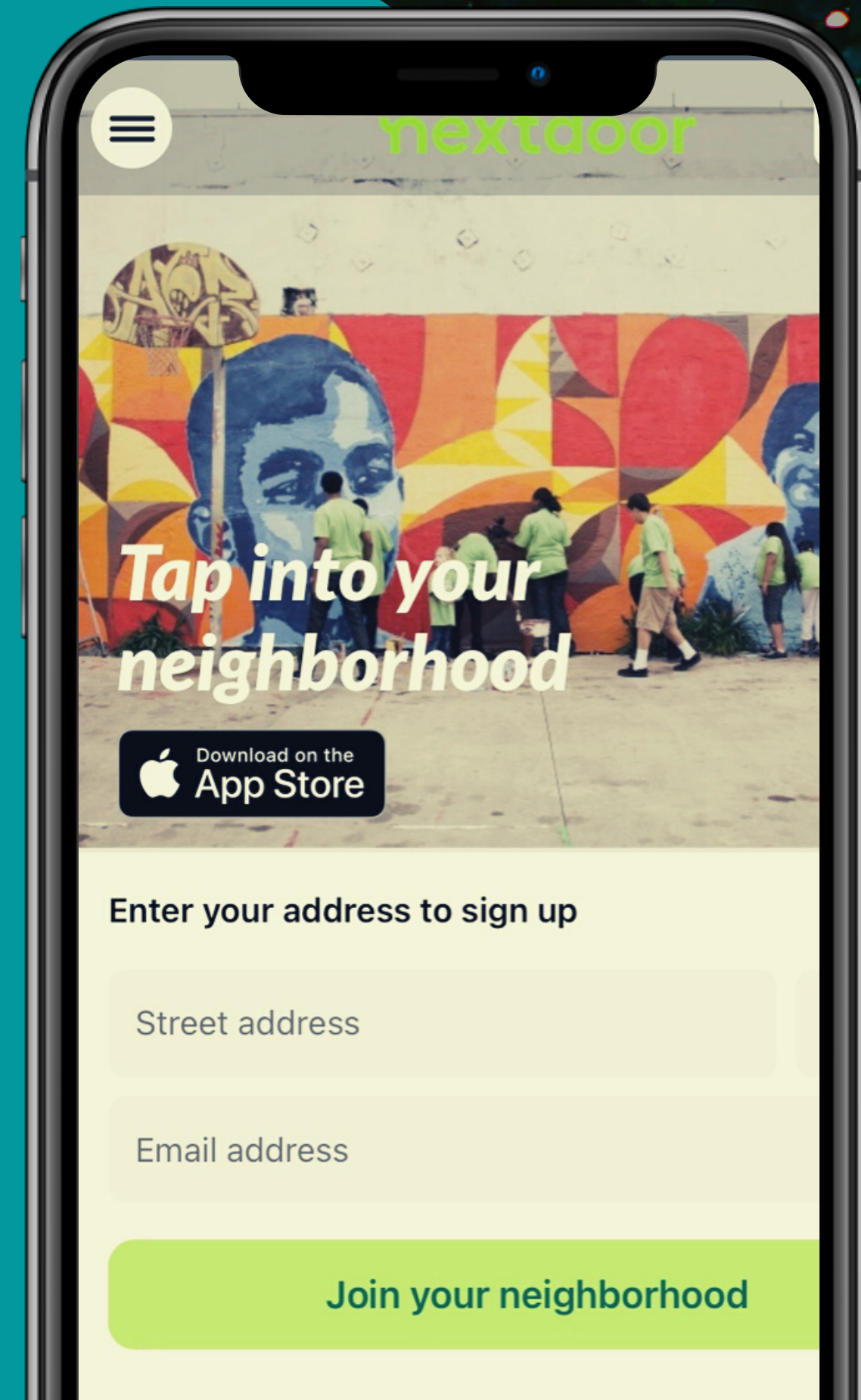
Tools include

- **Custom URL and Website**
Secure, hosted, accessible
- **Forums, ideas, mapping, stories, guestbook, Q & A, polls and surveys**
- **Analytics & Reporting Tools**
Data analysis of sentiments, easily read and shared with stakeholders or Councilors

Explore Next

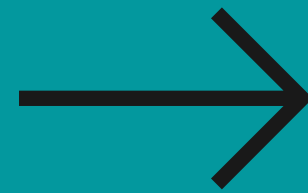
Expand use of existing or free tools in 2021 for increased engagement opportunities, for example:

- Use neighborhood based activity on **NextDoor App** to create opportunities for dialogue
- **SeeClickFix** issue reporting tool:
 - Set up districts or neighborhoods in this tool to create two way communications with some of our most active community members
- **Zoom Custom Exit Surveys, Polls & More**
 - In meeting tools like: **Kahoot!, Sli.do & Mentimeter**





Increased availability and type of tech used for info & engagement...



But who is left behind?

How do we address the digital divide when pushing for digital first services and engagement?

How do we weigh public health, privacy & security while maintaining inclusiveness?



Rapid increase in scalability & accessibility of new tech for communications, services & engagement...



But how do we sustain this level of growth with existing staffing levels?

How quickly can local government pivot to increase their capacity to maintain traditional methods while embracing the new at the same time?



Questions?

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