

Citizens as Shapers

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03

Citizens as Shapers

Design a solution that harnesses digital tools to increase the quantity and quality of citizens' participation in democratic processes

- What role can digital spaces play in moving people closer to the decisions that impact their lives?
- Your idea can address any level of participation, ranging from neighbourhood issues to national - or international - government policy.
- How might the current situation be enhanced or reimaged to dramatically increase civic engagement in policy development in the long term?

Think
Differently
About
Design

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Why do we think this is interesting?

- The public are rarely engaged in making public decisions – even though they are often closer to the problems than those developing the policies to tackle them. This divide results in a hugely untapped resource of creativity and insights that could be harnessed.
- Citizens are usually far more diverse than policy makers, in both their background and way of seeing the world. Greater citizen participation would draw a wider range of voices and experiences into public decision making, helping to identify new ideas and solutions.
- The public are also likely to be the people using the service developed or affected by decisions - by getting their input early it can drastically improve their chances of success.
- Normally, the public want to have their voices heard and improve things where they live. It's usually barriers that stop them from engaging – lack of time, evidence, convenience – in particular a feeling that their input isn't actually meaningful and won't be acted on by governments.
- As well as reaching more people, digital tools can engage residents on their terms, at places and times that suit them – rather than follow governments schedule. We know that (open) traditional approaches tend to attract people who are already motivated and have the means to engage.

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How to approach this brief

Here are a few suggestions on how students could approach this brief, and a few other things to consider:

- We would really encourage students to investigate the barriers people face to citizen participation in voting and decision making. Identify a target group (or groups) and explore their needs, spending time with people and truly develop an understanding of their wants and needs.
- We suggest that students consider the synergies and possible frictions of online and offline and think carefully about how the two interact. We don't just want to see a standalone app or website.
- We have provided a number of resources on the brief toolkit, including the CrowdLaw library of citizen engagement examples from across the world. The RSA and Nesta have also produced a wealth of lectures and resources on citizen engagement and digital democracy.
- We are looking for innovative, radical ideas. There has been a lot of work produced in this space already, so we'd like students to be bold. Acknowledge, but don't feel constrained by current technology and systems - we would welcome more speculative, thought provoking and left field entries. From very practical and implementable, to future-focused ideas, **either way, your work must be grounded in solid research.**

03 Citizens as Shapers

Awards + Benefits

- **Twitter award of £2000 which can be awarded to more than one winner + commendations**
- **Huge benefits to taking part - even if not shortlisted**
- **This brief provides experience to work on a topic in design for public services and policy - a large and growing area of social design**

Thank you

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