

Location: City of Santa Barbara

Issue: Public Budgeting

Methodology: Online Platform

Davenport Institute: 2010 Public Engagement Grant Recipient

Partners: City of Santa Barbara and Santa Barbara Noozhawk

The Online Budgeting Platform, supported by the Davenport Institute's 2010 Public Engagement Grant program, helped residents engage with local officials in prioritizing the City's budget. But unlike most grant projects, the award went, not to the city, but to a private news source that was willing to partner with the City of Santa Barbara to reach a wider number of residents.

Noozhawk is an online news source in the City of Santa Barbara that publishes stories both by professional journalists and by community members sharing their own stories about local activities. As such, Noozhawk was ideally situated to support the public engagement efforts of the City of Santa Barbara.

One lesson that many cities learn when trying to engage their residents online is that "if we build it, they will come," may work well for baseball fields, but it doesn't work so well for engagement platforms. Most residents don't spend a lot of time on city websites.

That's why it worked well to "take the platform to the people," locating it on a site that already saw significant local web traffic. Noozhawk publisher William Macfayden and Managing Editor Michelle Nelso headed up the effort, which provided valuable citizen input for the City of Santa Barbara.

As with other City's in California, Santa Barbara has struggled through the recent recession and the City has looked to its residents for help making difficult decisions. Noozhawk was able to provide information on the effects, outcomes, and requirements of various recommendations suggested through the civic engagement process and to invite further participation in an informed dialogue.

"Once that public opinion is gathered, we'll share our findings with city officials who are seeking such input during their budget deliberations," explained Mafayden at the start of the process.

You can read more about the project and its progress [here](#).