REOPENING THROUGH ENGAGEMENT

HOW CITIES AND COUNTIES CAN GET BACK TO BUSINESS QUICKER AND SMARTER WITH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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"Solving for stronger, more effective citizen engagement is key to reopening cities and counties, getting back to business, and ensuring thriving, connected communities."

As local government leaders increasingly focus on reopening, much remains uncertain. The challenging context of the COVID-19 pandemic has created new — and often urgent — resident needs. At the same time, many traditional, in-person channels of service and engagement remain closed or minimized.

Even prior to the pandemic, it was sometimes hard for governments and their constituents to connect. In any given city, how many people can name more than one council member? Do people know how to file a permit application? What opportunities are there to volunteer? It's not always the case that everyone knows what's going on in their own communities. This becomes an even more critical issue when residents aren't aware of resources such as food pantries, senior services, visiting nurse and medical equipment programs, and the like. These can be expensive for governments to provide, and continuation of funding demands a certain level of use.

In both contexts, an acceleration of digital processes and engagement channels is inevitable. As the pandemic response evolves, residents need access to public health updates, business opening information, and more. Notifying residents of severe weather, public safety concerns, and even community events are also ongoing considerations.

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OPPORTUNITY IN AN APP

Engaging everyone means reaching everyone, including all generations that make up a community. Recent research examined the major generations' interactions with local government. Every generation in the study felt there was an opportunity for deeper engagement. Using different engagement channels that meet everyone's diverse needs is important. Increasingly, providing options for residents that allow individuals to control how and what information they consume cuts through the message fatigue that affects us all. Beyond the city or county website, social media and mobile apps allow residents to opt in and receive notifications about what matters to them.

The **generational research** also showed that cohorts consuming local information through real-time digital channels receive government information much more frequently than those relying on newsletters or websites. This reveals an exciting opportunity.

A **cloud-based mobile app** focused on citizen engagement, such as Tyler Techologies' MyCivic™, is a unique way to put city hall in the hands of all residents at all times. Using such an app, local governments can drive residents to services and maximize their own program and technology investments. In addition to connecting residents with news, services, and events, MyCivic allows for two-way engagement, providing constituents with a one-stop shop for connecting with local government.

DIGITAL
CHANNELS

WEBSITE

MyCivic™

SOCIAL
MEDIA

MOBILE
APPS

REOPENING STRONG

What does this mean for reopening? No discussion of engagement is complete without meaningful public participation. As reopening phases unfold, economically healthier communities will be ones that invite residents into the decision-making process. Civic engagement apps provide a fast, cost-effective, accessible way to facilitate two-way communication through surveys or "opinions" features that capture resident feedback. This not only substantively enhances policy discussion, it sets the stage for public buy-in of official decisions.

Technology that connects the business functions of local government with the public can facilitate business success and community development. Offering online or mobile payments, form submissions, and other traditionally in-office transactions ensures that residents can "do business" with government from anywhere. Digital access to permitting and business licensing functions further supports economic development. Non-emergency notification systems can even be deployed to boost support of local businesses.

Physically reopening city hall is a moving target that looks different across the country. Mobile app tools, however, can be leveraged when doors open again. Creatively extending a civic engagement app's use to allow residents to submit paperwork online can help control in-person numbers in buildings to maintain compliance with public health guidelines.

Perhaps the key to any technology tool, including a civic engagement app, is its consistency. Such tools should not be implemented with any particular closing or opening in mind. An app is a new channel; a new way to communicate with constituents in all circumstances.

Civic engagement apps provide a fast, cost-effective, accessible way to facilitate two-way communication.

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COMMUNITY SUCCESS

This type of effective engagement is already happening.

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KERVILLE, TEXAS	Kerville, Texas, added a COVID-19 response hub button in its MyCivic app to give residents localized information through an easy access point.
ADDISON, ILLINOIS	Addison, Illinois, supported local restaurants by adding a directory in its app showing up-to-date curbside pick-up and takeout options.
EL CAJON, CALIFORNIA	El Cajon, California, allows businesses to self-edit directory listings in MyCivic, providing the most accurate and real-time information to customers. The city also uses the app to enhance virtual recreation. Residents can use the app to request city staff to draw hopscotch boards on their sidewalks or to distribute jump ropes and hula hoops to homes.
KYLE, TEXAS	Kyle, Texas, is using MyCivic to distribute Uber vouchers to assist with residents' public transportation needs.

TYLER, TEXAS

Tyler, Texas, provides a robust use example. Its MyCivic app is customized as MyTyler, with the city's unique branding. Over time, its popularity with residents led to more content and services, including:

- **Real-time traffic and transit maps**
- **A tool to request or change city water service**
- **Information about elected officials, boards and commissions, and city departments**
- **Current news bulletins**
- **Social media posts and videos**
- **City events in calendar view**
- **Park locations and bike routes**
- **Local business listings by category**
- **Access to city ordinances**

Effective use of any new tool, of course, comes from public education and adoption. To inform residents of the app's existence, Tyler city staff promoted it through its website and news magazine, as well as on decals on city vehicles. Posters display scannable QR codes that encourage downloads, which have reached more than **6,800** to date.

GET IT ON Google Play
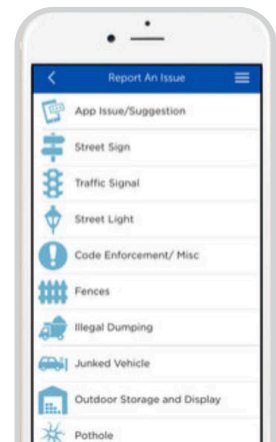
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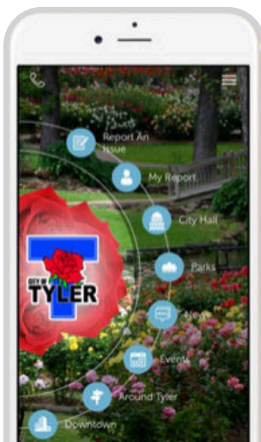
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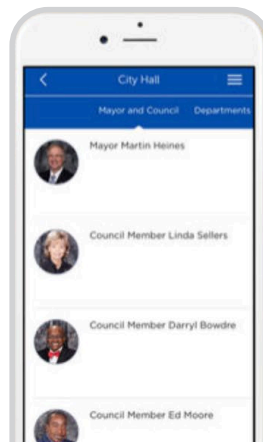
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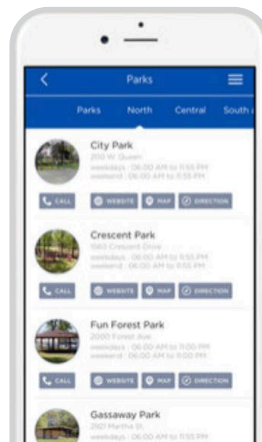
Discover Hidden Games
In Your City

The App That Gives You
The Power To Be The
Change

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> ❝ *An app is a new channel; a new way to communicate with constituents in all circumstances.*

APP INNOVATIONS

A notable feature of the cloud-based MyCivic app is its ability to use geolocation to target specific neighborhoods in the event of an emergency or more mundane issue such as a road closure. Other uses stretch as far as leaders can imagine. Tabs for new residents, for example, can provide all the information a new resident could want from schools to recreation opportunities to ways to get involved. Some enterprising cities are using civic apps to streamline public safety efforts. Should a car break-in or other event occur on a street, police can use the app to contact residents and request remote access to their external home security cameras. Integrating the app with social media including YouTube provides a new way for residents to view and participate in public meetings. At-risk residents without access to a computer but who have mobile phones can use the app to find needed resources.

Another compelling benefit for residents comes in the area of utilities. With the app's notification capability, residents can receive alerts when utility bills are coming due. What's more, notifications can contain links to easy online payment options that, if used, save residents from being disconnected.

A TRUE WIN-WIN

These benefits for residents also translate into quick wins for local leaders. Take the utilities example. While residents are prompted to pay, do so from a mobile device, and avoid disconnection, governments also save. Phone calls for lost utility bills all but disappear. Instances of paying a utility truck to go to a residence for a disconnection — only to find that the customer had just paid — are eliminated.

There is also significant return on investment on government services and community events through notifications. As things reopen, parks, recreation, street fairs, farmer's markets, and more can see increased attendance from increased awareness. MyCivic typically reduces calls and walk-ins to city halls by 20%, which amounts to an extra day each week for staff to attend to other priorities. Facilitating mobile reporting of issues also reduces walk-in traffic while allowing staff to catch issues when they're small, saving future large expenditures. Finally, when budgets are tight, using the app to promote local businesses preserves vital tax revenue.

All communications between MyCivic and internal city systems flow through a secure API. Faster, easier updates in a single app help officials make better use of their promotion budgets and simplify work for IT and communications staff. During the COVID-19 response, news and social media updates could be automatically cross-posted on the app to maximize reach. Targeted push notifications tailored to specific neighborhoods imparted urgent information.

All of this enhances community perception of government service. Government officials know that public satisfaction increases when people can easily find information without having to hunt for it or make a call. While leaders know how much they invest in back-office areas such as financial or code enforcement software, that effort is largely invisible to the public. An engaging mobile app, however, is something that residents both notice and use to make their lives easier.

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FAST IMPLEMENTATION

Fast implementation is a significant benefit to all officials, particularly newly elected ones. Campaign platforms of civic engagement and transparency can be implemented in practice through **MyCivic** in about six weeks, on average. Integrations ensure that an entire website's content can be wrapped in an app without engaging a developer or requiring added tech staff. Immediately upon going live, the app connects government to the community in the visible and useful ways noted above. Many cities achieve quick implementations with the ability to add new functionalities and integrations over time to keep costs down. Tyler, Texas, for example, rolled out new capabilities incrementally, as **MyTyler**'s use grew.
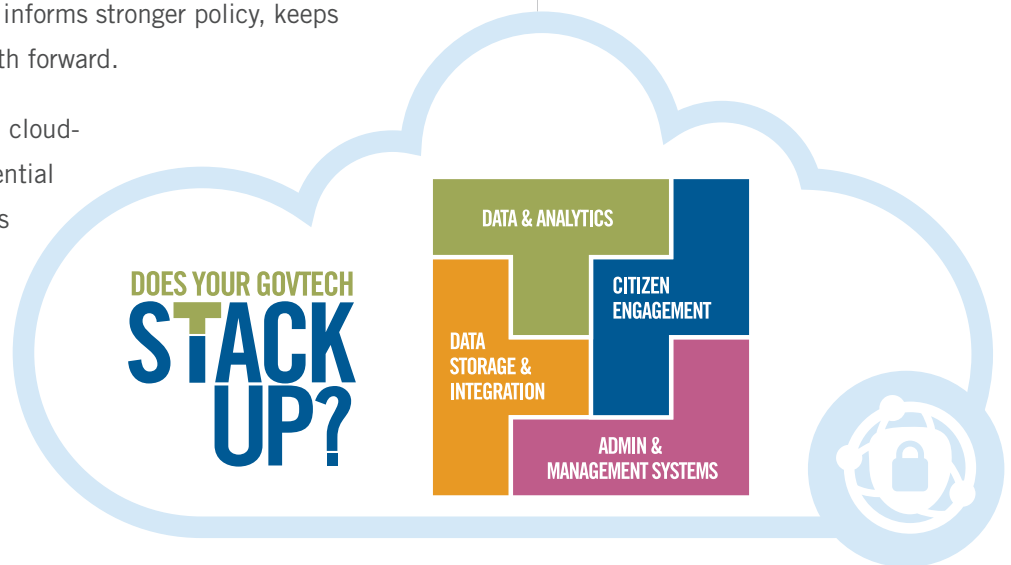
CHANGING THE GAME

In a time of change and reopening, local leaders recognize a uniquely high demand from constituents who want timely information about their communities. From voting locations to disaster relief, public safety to business continuity, there is a new urgency around easy, mobile access to services and information.

This is why citizen engagement is one of the foundational components of a successful government's modern GovTech Stack. Without it, all too often community members are frustrated and feel locked out. This is particularly true after lengthy pandemic shutdowns. In recovery and reopening, active participation from all residents informs stronger policy, keeps business alive, and drives growth forward.

Simply put, providing a quality, cloud-based digital experience is essential to reopening cities and counties today, and delivering the best services tomorrow. MyCivic changes the game by quickly and securely creating the connections necessary for strong, vibrant communities.

DOES YOUR GOVTECH
STACK UP?

DATA & ANALYTICS

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

DATA STORAGE & INTEGRATION

ADMIN & MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

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SOFTWARE THAT THINKS LIKE YOU DO.

Tyler Technologies (NYSE: TYL) provides integrated software and technology services to the public sector. Tyler's end-to-end solutions empower local, state, and federal government entities to operate more efficiently and connect more transparently with their constituents and with each other.

By connecting data and processes across disparate systems, Tyler's solutions are transforming how clients gain actionable insights that solve problems in their communities. Tyler has more than 26,000 successful installations across more than 10,000 sites, with clients in all 50 states, Canada, the Caribbean, Australia, and other international locations.

A financially strong company, Tyler has achieved double-digit revenue growth every quarter since 2012. It was also named to Forbes' "Best Midsize Employers" list in 2019 and recognized twice on its "Most Innovative Growth Companies" list. More information about Tyler Technologies, headquartered in Plano, Texas, can be found at tylertech.com.

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