

Application Form

PART 1: BASIC DATA

CATEGORIES IN WHICH YOU WANT TO APPLY THE EXPERIENCE

1: TYPE OF EXPERIENCE: *choose the most important element (choose only one element which you consider the most outstanding of your practice).*

A) Deliberation Citizen assembly / deliberation workshop / lottery / legislative theater / participatory planning	
B) Decision Participatory budget / referendum / consultation / participatory process with vote	x
C) Citizenship Citizenship / community action / permanent council / civic education / associationism / other initiatives to reinforce local democracy	

2: TYPE OF GOVERNMENT: *choose one only.*

A) Up to 50,000 inhabitants (towns, small cities, rural areas).	
B) Cities between 50,000 and 250,000 inhabitants.	
C) Cities between 250,000 and 1,000,000 inhabitants.	
D) Large cities or urban areas of more than 1,500,000 inhabitants.	
E) Supralocal, regional, provincial governments	x

Experience data: *complete the information below in a clear and concise manner.*

Title of the experience: The PropTech Innovation Fund
Name of the city or region: England
Inhabitants of the city or territory: 68.9 million people
Country: Great Britain

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Institution presenting the candidacy: The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities		
Website of the experience or institution: https://www.localdigital.gov.uk/digital-planning/		
Profiles in social networks of the experience or the institution: Twitter @DigiPlanningGov LinkedIn: @Digital Planning UK Gov		
Start date of the experience: August 2021		
End date of the experience: ongoing		
Budget of the experience: £5.2 million to date		
Type of candidacy <i>(mark with an X in the right column)</i>	New experience	
	Innovation on an existing experience	X
	Continuity of an experience	
Type of experience <i>(mark with an X in the right column, you may choose more than one)</i>	Participatory budgeting	
	Participatory planning	X
	Standing council	
	Workshop / meeting for diagnosis, monitoring, etc.	
	Public hearing / forum	
	Poll / referendum	
	Assemblies / Citizen juries / Deliberation spaces	
	E-government / Open government / Digital platforms	X
	Citizen initiative	
	Other (specify):	

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<p>Objective of the experience</p> <p><i>(mark with an X in the right column, you may choose more than one)</i></p>	To achieve higher levels of equality in terms of participation		X
	Including diversity as a criterion for inclusion		X
	Community empowerment		X
	To empower non-organised citizens		X
	To increase citizen's rights in terms of political participation		X
	To connect different tools of participation within a participatory democracy "ecosystem"		X
	To improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the mechanisms of participatory democracy		X
	To improve the quality of public decision-making through the mechanisms of participatory democracy		X
	To improve the evaluation and accountability of the mechanisms of participatory democracy		X
To improve any public policy through the active participation of the public		X	
<p>Territorial area</p> <p><i>(mark with an X in the right column, you may choose more than one)</i></p>	All the territory	Local	X
		Regional	X
	District		X
	Neighbourhood		X
<p>Thematic area</p>	Governance		
	Education		
	Transport		
	Urban management		X

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<i>(mark with an X in the right column, you may choose more than one)</i>	Health	
	Security	
	Environment / Climate change and/or urban agriculture	
	Civic associations, grassroots and new social movements	
	Culture	
	Housing	X
	Job creation	
	Decentralization	
	Local development	X
	Training / learning	
	Economy and/or finances	
	Legal regulations	
	Social inclusion	
	All	
Other - Urban Policy & Planning	X	
Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) associated with the practice <i>(mark with an X in the right column, more than one option can be chosen, you can also add the specific target)</i>	SDG 1 - No poverty	
	SDG 2 - Zero hunger	
	SDG 3 - Good health and well-being	
	SDG 4 - Quality education	
	SDG 5 - Gender equality	

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	SDG 6 - Clean water and sanitation	
	SDG 7 - Affordable and clean energy	
	SDG 8 - Decent work and economic growth	
	SDG 9 - Industry, innovation and infrastructure	
	SDG 10 - Reduced inequality	X
	SDG 11 - Sustainable cities and communities	X
	SDG 12 - Responsible consumption and production	
	SDG 13 - Climate action	
	SDG 14 - Life below water	
	SDG 15 - Life on land	
	SDG 16 - Peace, justice and strong institutions	
	SDG 17 - Partnership for the goals	

PART 2: DESCRIPTION OF THE EXPERIENCE

Fill in the following fields clearly and concisely. You can add links, images or graphics if you consider it appropriate.

Context:

In a **maximum of 300 words**, present the cultural, geographical, historical, institutional and socioeconomic context of the city, region or territory in which the experience takes place.

The PropTech Innovation Fund launched in 2021 operates within England, focusing on local authorities and communities across the country.

England has a rich cultural heritage and diverse communities, with cities and regions that vary in size, demographics, and socio economic conditions. The historical

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context of planning in England has witnessed both successes and challenges in engaging citizens in decision-making processes. There is a recognition of the need to improve community participation and ensure that local voices are heard and valued in planning decisions.

Institutionally, England operates a planning system that involves local authorities responsible for a wide range of services and functions that directly impact the daily lives of residents. They manage areas such as education, social services, transportation and most importantly or most relevant to this submission - planning and development. However, there has been a growing recognition that community input is often overlooked or undervalued in the planning process. This has led to a sense of frustration and disenfranchisement among local residents, highlighting the importance of enhancing citizen participation.

Socioeconomically, England faces various housing challenges, including shortages, affordability issues, and the need for sustainable development. These challenges directly impact communities and require effective citizen engagement to ensure that planning decisions align with local needs, preferences and aspirations.

The PropTech Innovation Fund addresses these challenges by funding council-led pilots to leverage digital technology and innovative approaches hence acting as a delivery vehicle to enhance citizen participation in planning and housing decisions.

The fund has funded 64 pilot initiatives across 47 Local Authorities to date, across various cities, regional and local authorities in England from Bradford to Cornwall. Through directly working with local authorities, adopted digital technology is tailored to meet the specific needs and priorities of their communities, acknowledging the importance of context in effective citizen participation.

Precedents:

*Explain the precedents and origins of the experience: if it is the innovation of an existing experience, what are its origins; if it is a new experience, what are the antecedents in participation in your city, region or territory. You can also indicate if you have been inspired by experiences in other cities/countries. (In a **maximum of 300 words**).*

Community engagement and consultation in England within the planning and housing space have seen both challenges and successes in recent years. The existing planning system is widely acknowledged to be flawed and ineffective, necessitating the exploration of innovative approaches to improve citizen participation. The PropTech Innovation Fund builds upon and scales exemplary community engagement principles while addressing the shortcomings of the current system. One of the most pressing issues is that community input is often overlooked or undervalued in planning decisions. Local residents often perceive that their concerns and preferences regarding housing developments are disregarded in favour

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of meeting housing targets or economic objectives. Consequently, frustration, disempowerment, and a sense of disenfranchisement prevail among communities. Compounding this issue is the inaccessibility and complexity of the current community experience in planning. The technical language and voluminous, often non-digitised documents that are associated with planning deter community members from actively engaging in the decision-making process.

In some cases, community engagement is seen or undertaken by private developers in particular as perfunctory exercise, where consultations are conducted merely to fulfil legal requirements rather than genuinely involving the community in shaping planning policies. This tokenistic approach erodes trust and fosters cynicism among residents, who feel their voices are not genuinely being heard or considered.

However, amidst these challenges, there are noteworthy examples where community engagement is being done exceptionally well, both from within our PropTech Innovation Fund and organically in the market. These examples highlight the potential for improvement and serve as sources of inspiration for the fund's initiatives. In subsequent sections, we expand on the strides our Fund has made towards improving the experience in the following sections.

Objectives of the experience:

*What is the objective listed in Part 1 that you think is the most important, and indicate other outstanding objectives of the experience. (In a **maximum of 100 words**).*

The primary objective of our Fund, and of improving the community engagement experience, is to create more meaningful and inclusive conversations between local authorities and residents on key planning and housing issues. In the context of this application, the objective of the Fund aligns more closely with the aim of:

To improve the quality of public decision-making through the mechanisms of participatory democracy

In practice this means streamlining the engagement process in a way that empowers and spotlights a range of voices from the community and frees up local planning officers from administrative tasks, so they have more time to spend on true placemaking and co-design.

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Methodology:

*Describe the methodology of the experience: phases of the process, participation channels. (In a **maximum of 300 words**).*

The PropTech Innovation Fund follows a well-defined methodology that has evolved throughout the four rounds of funding to enhance citizen participation in the planning and housing sector.

Firstly, the fund identifies innovative projects and technologies that have the potential to improve citizen participation in planning. Once selected, the team actively collaborates with project teams including local authorities and suppliers to establish partnerships, creating a supportive ecosystem for testing and refining solutions.

Project teams develop and test digital tools, involving close collaboration with a diverse pool of stakeholders. Feedback is collated and analysed to refine and improve digital solutions. Successful digital tools are then adopted by Local Authorities, enabling evolution of existing processes. Feedback loops are established to gather insights from local authorities, supplier partners and wider stakeholders, informing refinement for future funding rounds methodology.

In terms of participation channels, the funded pilots utilise a variety of approaches. Online platforms provide accessible and user-friendly channels for community members to contribute their ideas, preferences, and concerns. Workshops and public meetings foster face-to-face interactions, while surveys and feedback mechanisms collect quantitative and qualitative data. Community representatives and advisory groups ensure diverse perspectives are considered.

While the specific process can vary depending on the platform or local authority, we have provided an outline below of the steps a resident may go through to respond to a digital planning consultation through one of the pilots in our Fund. This is drastically improved compared to current 'box ticking' consultation exercises which often are a one way conversation:

Awareness: Residents become aware of the planning consultation through various channels (both digital and traditional), such as notifications on the local authority's website, social media, email newsletters, or community groups.

Accessing the consultation: The resident visits the digital platform hosting the consultation which has been made accessible and available in multiple different languages to allow a broad audience to understand and engage.

Reviewing information: Unlike with traditional means of engagement, the resident can access all project details online, such as plans, descriptions, and supporting documents. The information is presented in a user-friendly format, potentially including visual representations, maps, and images.

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Providing feedback: The resident is invited to give their views. This could include filling out a very quick social media survey, playing a virtual game, participating in an interactive mapping exercise or putting on a VR headset in person.

Tracking progress: The engagement process continues beyond consultation, with residents being able to access updates regarding the progress of the consultation and subsequent stages. This ensures transparency and keeps participants informed about how their feedback is being considered.

Reporting back: Once the resident has provided their feedback, local authorities are able to use digital tools to automatically summarise consultation feedback received, and to display that feedback visually so that it can be published publicly and viewed by not just residents but all other planning stakeholders.

Innovation:

*Explain what you consider as the most innovative aspect(s) in the practice. (In a **maximum of 150 words**).*

The Fund is at the forefront of pioneering innovative practices, notably pilots that are offering real-time collaboration and insights into planning via 3D models. For example, our pilot in Wirral is developing a live infrastructure delivery plan linked to a 3D model which will show every piece of infrastructure that has been committed to and/or being built in the Borough. This is updated live everytime a developer submits a major planning application and enables the local authority to ensure transparency on development for communities, attract investment from developers and better manage their public realm spaces.

In addition, many of our pilots are exploring artificial intelligence, natural language processing and machine learning to help them analyse large datasets and visualise complex information. Cornwall Council saw that their 3D modelling pilot has enabled them to pursue their first ever tall building, unlocking potential for over 250 new homes.

Inclusion:

*Point out the importance of including as many groups and diverse populations as possible, and how you have achieved it. (In a **maximum of 150 words**).*

Including as many diverse groups in the planning process is crucial for achieving inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development. It promotes representation, empowers communities, enhances decision-making and builds trust.

Waltham Forest successfully made their consultation more inclusive through bringing digital tools into their engagement. The team achieved over 100% increase in the percentage of people who would describe their ethnic background as Asian/Asian

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British engaged via the platform AND over 100% increase in the percentage of people who would describe their ethnic background as Black/African/Black British/Caribbean compared to previous engagement in Lea Bridge.

In addition, Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (bringing over 23,000 new homes to the area) saw digital lead to increased engagement with both younger people under 35 (with 19% of respondents) and those over 75 (4%), with diverse ethnic minority communities (16%), and with people who have a disability or long-term illness (41%).

Communication:

*What has been the strategy and communication channels of the experience for engaging the population. (In a **maximum of 150 words**)*

Local Authorities within the Fund use a range of innovative digital tools and communication channels to consult communities.

Some of the channels used by local authorities include online platforms providing access to project information, interactive maps, surveys, and discussion forums. Many local authorities have had success using social media to increase awareness and reach for their consultations, such as Harlow and Gilston Garden Town who received 3 x greater respondents than previous consultations. Interestingly some pilots have often found that social media is not a golden bullet for reaching young people. Other local authorities have gamified the consultation process, with interactive mapping tools that give residents a budget and allow them to 'buy' pieces of infrastructure and build a virtual town. This educates residents on the trade offs required when it comes to development.

Articulation with other actors:

*Explain how the experience was articulated with different actors and simultaneous or pre-existing processes. What roles did these participants assume? Explain the degree of success of this articulation. (In a **maximum of 150 words**)*

The digital approaches we are pioneering require various stakeholders to adapt and embrace certain changes. This has fostered a supportive ecosystem for testing, refining, and implementing innovative solutions.

The degree of success can be measured by the fund's achievements in advancing citizen participation in planning and housing. For example, the success of planning officers at Bolsover District Council adopting digital tools to better communicate land use decision making to residents was recognised in the Geospatial Commission's ['Finding Common Ground'](#) report (p33).

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This success can be attributed to the collaboration between local authorities, suppliers and stakeholders who develop products with a user-centred design focus to ensure the needs of various stakeholders are prioritised. Examples include a trial ongoing between Southampton City Council, Statutory Consultees and selected Developers, who are exploring the use of a digital platform called Konveio to collaborate live on a digital Local Plan document for the first time.

Evaluation:

*What evaluation mechanisms have been implemented? Develop whether the citizenry has participated in the evaluation of the practice. (In a **maximum of 300 words**).*

The monitoring and evaluation framework for the Fund encompasses four key aspects: time and cost savings for local authorities, increase in quantity of engagement, increase in quality (diversity and representativeness) of engagement, and increase in positive sentiment for planning.

To measure time and cost savings, data is collected and analysed to assess the efficiency gains achieved through digital tools and processes. By comparing the time taken for tasks before and after implementation of the funded pilots, along with a comparison of costs associated with traditional engagement methods, we were able to determine the extent of savings for local authorities.

Quantifying the increase in engagement quantity involved tracking participant numbers, responses, and interactions across digital platforms. Analytics and data from online surveys, website visits, and social media metrics were utilised to demonstrate the scale of increased community involvement compared to previous consultations.

Measuring engagement quality, particularly diversity and representativeness, requires collecting demographic data, which is often difficult for local authorities to obtain. Where possible, the pilots asked residents to provide demographic details, enabling a comparison of their profiles to the wider community. Where data was available, this helped determine if the digital approach successfully reached a more diverse range of voices.

Assessing the increase in positive sentiment involved analysing qualitative feedback. For example, the digital pilot Lambeth Council ran with us saw a 37% increase in positive sentiment compared to their previous 2021 consultation.

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The monitoring and evaluation framework combines quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to assess the Fund's impact, and we combine this insight with anecdotal evidence provided by local authorities. Through analysis of the results, we and local authorities are able to use that data to inform programme improvements that support the wider scaling of these digital engagement initiatives.

Impacts and results

*Describe the impacts and results of the process. How many people have participated, and what are their profiles? What have been the impacts on public policies, the functioning of the administration, and the citizenry? (In a **maximum of 300 words**).*

The Fund has been recognised as global best practice in government innovation by the OECD, who included our work in their report on [Global Trends in Government Innovation 2023](#). Some of the most exciting outcomes from the Fund have been included below:

- Over 179,000 people saw the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town consultation, with 3 x greater respondents than previous consultations
- SW Herts generated over 3,000 responses and over 1.2 million social media impressions for their Joint Local Plan (23% of visitors were under 34 - engaging young people was one of their main goals)
- For Newham's pilot, 78% of participants said they had not (before this project) used Newham's engagement platform - this shows the number of new voices they were able to bring into planning discussions through the digital pilot
- Surrey County Council achieved a 342% increase in respondents under the age of 34 compared to the previous consultation
- In Waltham Forest, there was an over 100% increase in the percentage of people who would describe their ethnic background as Asian/Asian British engaged via the platform AND over 100% increase in the percentage of people who would describe their ethnic background as Black/African/Black British/Caribbean compared to previous engagement in Lea Bridge
- In Watford's pilot, 75% of residents said receiving alerts would make them more likely to get involved with the Council's planning service. In addition, 80% said it would allow them to access and understand planning information online quicker and easier

In addition, 15 PropTech companies were procured using this funding, with some working in planning and local gov sector for the first time. This is helping nurture the emerging PropTech market in the UK and create a sustainable pipeline of PropTech companies that can meet the growing demand for digital planning innovation.

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PART 3: EXPERIENCE SUMMARY

*A summary of the experience: origins, objectives, operation, results, monitoring, and evaluation. (Do not hesitate to repeat aspects that have already been written before. This summary will be shared on the digital platform for open evaluation and in the publication of the award). (In a **maximum of 500 words**).*

The current state of community input in planning decisions often overlooks or undervalues input from local communities. This leads to frustration, disempowerment, and a lack of trust among residents who feel their voices are disregarded. Traditional planning consultation experiences are often inaccessible and difficult to navigate, with technical language and extensive documents deterring community engagement.

Our PropTech Innovation Fund aims to address the challenges faced by communities in participating effectively in planning decisions, while also enhancing the transparency and inclusivity of the process. Our work is driven by the need to address the shortcomings of the current planning system and seeks to leverage UK PropTech capability and innovation to transform the planning process, empower communities, save time and money for local authorities and ensure a more meaningful and positive conversation around placemaking.

The Fund has a monitoring and evaluation framework to measure the impact of our initiatives on four key areas: time and cost savings for local authorities, increased quantity of engagement, improved quality in terms of diversity and representativeness, and an increase in positive sentiment for planning.

Initial results from Round 1 and Round 2 of the Fund (Rounds 2.5 and 3 are still live) have shown promising outcomes, including increased community participation, time and resource efficiencies, greater diversity in community groups that engage, positive sentiment shifts in planning conversations and the development of innovative and scalable digital tools by PropTech companies.

The success of the PropTech Innovation Fund's initiatives highlights the potential for more meaningful and inclusive conversations between local authorities and residents on planning and housing issues. Below are some examples of how and where this has been achieved:

Over 179,000 people saw the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town consultation, with 3 x greater respondents than previous consultations

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South West Hertfordshire generated over 3,000 responses and over 1.2 million social media impressions for their Joint Local Plan (23% of visitors were under 34 - engaging young people was one of their main goals)

For London Borough of Newham's pilot, 78% of participants said they had not (before this project) used Newham's engagement platform - this shows the number of new voices they were able to bring into planning discussions through the digital pilot

Surrey County Council achieved a 342% increase in respondents under the age of 34 compared to the previous consultation (this gave a much greater reach to younger participants which was the project's primary aim)

In the London Borough of Waltham Forest, there was an over 100% increase in the percentage of people who would describe their ethnic background as Asian/Asian British engaged via the platform AND over 100% increase in the percentage of people who would describe their ethnic background as Black/African/Black British/Caribbean compared to previous engagement in Lea Bridge

The Fund has been recognised as global best practice in government innovation by the OECD, who included our work in their report on [Global Trends in Government Innovation 2023](#).

We invite you to share annexes that allow you to better illustrate your experience: videos, photographs, documents... These can be sent through a file transfer service, such as WeTransfer, Dropbox or Google Drive.

Thank you for participating!