**PropTech Engagement Fund: Expression of Interest**

**Summary**

The Planning for the Future White Paper set out a vision to increase the use of digital engagement within the planning process, to make the planning system more accountable and democratic through offering alternative routes to engage alongside traditional forms of engagement.

The PropTech Engagement Fund will support the widespread adoption of digital citizen engagement tools and services. Funded projects will enable us to better understand the barriers to be overcome to allow councils to adopt these tools at scale.

**Scope**

The PropTech Engagement Fund will begin with engagement around the plan-making process and development management, two key areas of consultation where digital can help broaden the range of voices and views being heard. We recognise there is an emerging market offering digital citizen engagement tools and services; our approach is to foster and steer these existing market offerings and accelerate adoption.

We will select up to 12 local planning authorities in this funding round. Each of the funded LPAs will procure and test a digital engagement tool or service to address one of the themes specified below. LPAs will be expected to use G-Cloud or Spark DPS for their procurement in order to access a range of suppliers, with support available for Commercial teams to help with the procurement process.

LPAs will be able to apply to run a digital engagement pilot for one of the four following themes:

**Theme 1: Plan-making Process: Regulation 18**

Early-stage engagement with communities enables citizens to contribute feedback on what a Local Plan should contain, but the current system only engages a small minority of voices. Digital tools and services can enhance consultations in a number of ways, from presenting information in a more visually engaging manner to reaching a larger and more diverse range of citizens.

Local Authorities addressing Theme 1 will leverage digital solutions to make community involvement more accessible and engaging at the early stages of plan-making. This could include improving the quality of content presented or broadening the range of voices and views represented in Regulation 18 consultations.

**Theme 2: Plan-making Process: Regulation 19**

Engagement on a draft Local Plan enables citizens to comment and feedback on proposals, but consultation is dominated by the few willing and able to navigate the process. Digital solutions can support LPAs to better visualise the plans being proposed and broaden the demographics represented including feedback from traditionally hard-to-reach groups.

Local authorities addressing Theme 2 will leverage digital solutions to make community involvement more accessible and engaging at the draft Local Plan stage. This could include improving the quality of content presented or broadening the range of voices and views represented in Regulation 19 consultations.

**Theme 3: Development Management: Planning Publicity**

Publicity is an important part of ensuring a democratic planning process, but residents should not have to rely on planning notices attached to lamp posts, printed in newspapers or posted in libraries. Digital approaches can make planning information easier to find and understand and make it appear in the places where discussions are happening, for example in digital neighbourhood groups and social networks.

Local authorities addressing Theme 3 will make it radically easier for citizens to find out about planning applications and increase public participation from a broader audience. We are interested in planning applications of all types; this could be tested across householder applications, for example, or could focus on a major or minor development.

**Theme 4: Development Management: Managing & Analysing Responses**

All the comments local planning authorities receive from the community need to be analysed, key themes need to be identified and non-material comments need to be separated out. This can create additional challenges for local authorities receiving a high volume of responses, especially when replies come through a mix of letters, emails, and wider digital platforms. However, technology can improve their ability to analyse feedback at scale and more efficiently identify key themes and issues.

Local authorities addressing Theme 4 will leverage innovative approaches to more efficiently manage and analyse a higher volume of responses (received from both digital and non-digital channels) to inform decision-making. This will include going through a development management consultation using both digital and non-digital engagement channels.

**Geographical scope:**

We will aim to test local authorities spread across a range of locations and representative of different contexts in England, including Urban, Rural, Two-tier, Unitary and Joint Plan areas.

**Basic Information**

**Body/bodies responsible for consultation:**

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)

**Duration:**

The expression of interest will be open for 4 weeks from 3 August 2021 to 31 August 2021.

**Deadline:**

The deadline for submission of expressions of interest is 31 August 2021.

**Question and Answer Session:**

We will be hosting a Q&A session for Local Authorities on 18 August 2021. Please [register for this session](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/proptech-engagement-fund-pre-application-qa-registration-165147487581) by 16 August 2021.

**Contact details:**

Please contact us with any queries at DigitalPlanningTeam@communities.gov.uk

**How to respond:**

Please use this [application form](https://localdigital.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/PropTech-Engagement-Fund-Application-for-Round-1-1.docx) when you submit your expression of interest and return it to [DigitalPlanningTeam@communities.gov.uk](mailto:DigitalPlanningTeam@communities.gov.uk) by 31 August 2021.

**Invitation for Expressions of Interest**

The programme intends to fund 10-12 projects that address one of the following four themes:

* **Theme 1: Plan-making Process: Regulation 18 (up to £100k)** Local authorities addressing Theme 1 will leverage digital solutions to make community involvement more accessible and engaging at the early stages of plan-making. This could include improving the quality of content presented or broadening the range of voices and views represented in Regulation 18 consultations.
* **Theme 2: Plan-making Process: Regulation 19 (up to £100k)** Local authorities addressing Theme 2 will leverage digital solutions to make community involvement more accessible and engaging at the draft Local Plan stage. This could include improving the quality of content presented or broadening the range of voices and views represented in Regulation 19 consultations.
* **Theme 3: Development Management: Planning Publicity (up to £100k)** Local authorities addressing Theme 3 will make it radically easier for citizens to find out about planning applications and increase public participation from a broader audience. We are interested in planning applications of all types; this could be tested across householder applications, for example, or could focus on a major or minor development.
* **Theme 4: Development Management: Managing & Analysing Responses (up to £100k)** Local authorities addressing Theme 4 will leverage innovative approaches to more efficiently manage and analyse a higher volume of responses (received from both digital and non-digital channels) to inform decision-making. This will include going through a development management consultation using both digital and non-digital engagement channels.

We will be seeking a mix of proposals from across different locations and contexts.  We expect to select LPAs spread across England with different spatial contexts, demographics, and digital and consultation resources.

You may respond by submitting the application form including details listed below.

**Application requirements**

Please complete the application form details, keeping to the maximum word limit. **This covers:**

1. **Objectives, Outcomes and Learnings** - a summary of the digital engagement pilot you’d like to run, objectives and outcomes you want to achieve, and what learnings you anticipate being useful to other LPAs.
2. **Project Plan** - how you plan to deliver the pilot which should cover key events or milestones, how you’ll measure whether objectives have been met, proposed team roles and stakeholder engagement.
3. **Working with Suppliers** - what kind of supplier(s) you expect to procure, what outputs you will ask them to deliver, and what pre-market engagement you’ve had so far.
4. **Budget** - a breakdown of how the funding from MHCLG will be spent (e.g. software license cost, marketing outreach budget, backfilling roles if needed, etc).
5. **Spatial Context** - the type of context, or area type that applies to the local authority.

There are two additional questions which will not be scored, but which will help inform support offered:

1. **Supporting procurement** - what support you would find helpful to aid the procurement process.
2. **Digital engagement background & hurdles** - what previous digital engagement you have run, if any, and what hurdles you would expect if you were pursuing this project outside the PropTech Engagement Fund.

**Assessment criteria and weighting**

We expect to assess the EoI against the criteria listed above (A-E), with a weighting of:

* + A. Objectives, Outcomes and Learnings (30%)
  + B. Project Plan (30%)
  + C. Working with Suppliers (20%)
  + D. Budget (10%)
  + E. Spatial Context (10%)

**PropTech Engagement Fund programme outputs and timescale**

LPAs will be expected to:

* + Hold an introductory meeting with MHCLG officials, establishing what baseline data we can compare the pilot outcomes to.
  + Hold a kickoff meeting with external suppliers that will form a part of the project team, in which MHCLG officials will be in attendance.
  + Hold monthly show and tells to provide progress updates, surface any challenges and showcase work that has taken place. A monthly user research check-in will run on an alternating schedule so that every 2 weeks is either a show & tell or a user research check-in to feed in learnings or surface any issues. There will be opportunities to engage further if you have more you want to discuss or share.
  + Create a short written report (max 3 pages) at the end of the project summarising the outcomes, learnings, hurdles and what could be improved in the future (e.g. policy, guidance, or engagement approaches). A list of topics and metrics will be provided to guide the report. It is up to the local planning authority if they would like to have this written by the supplier with input from the project team.

Procurement support:

* Support will be provided to LPAs to help Commercial teams use either G-Cloud or Spark DPS for procurement.

Interim milestone (by 14 December 2021)

* + LPAs have all concluded procurement and held kick-off meetings with suppliers.

Final milestone (by 25 March 2022)

* + End of project reports submitted.
  + Feedback session with all LPAs.

**Timeline**

3 August: Expression of Interest process launch

16 August: Q&A event registration closes

18 August: Expression of Interest Q&A with councils

31 August: Submissions due

1 to 17 September: Selection process

28 September: Notification and appointment of LPAs

5 October to 15 October: Grant payment

26 October: LPAs publish tenders on G-Cloud or Spark DPS

26 October to 12 November: Supplier bids submitted to LPAs

15 November to 29 November: LPAs select and appoint supplier

1 December to 14 December: Project kick-off meeting  with supplier

25 March 2022: Projects completed