

designdemocracy.ac.nz

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What is the Design+Democracy Project?

We are a research unit at Massey University's College of Creative Arts that encourages youth participation in social issues through design. This year we have created VoteLocal: a gameful questionnaire that guides people towards finding a best match among their local mayoral candidates.

How does VoteLocal work for the user?

The tool is simple: VoteLocal asks a series of questions, with responses being used to calculate and suggest which candidates are most compatible with that user. VoteLocal will provide information about the candidates and links to their website and social media. It also educates users about what councils do, how it is relevant to them, and raises awareness about the elections in general. Importantly, it is social and shareable, sparking conversations about politics with peers and family.

As a user plays VoteLocal they generate a custom city in the recognisable guise of their own city (Auckland, Wellington or Palmerston North). Their city avatar can be shared through social media, encouraging further peer-to-peer participation and engagement.

How do you know it will work?

The initiative builds on the success of one of the Design+Democracy Project's previous voter engagement innovations: On the Fence. During the 2014 General Elections, On the Fence attracted over 170,000 unique visitors with independent research telling us it encouraged 30,000 non-voting 18–34 year olds to vote, representing 7% of the total eligible youth population. As these initiatives are aimed at facilitating an increase in youth voter turnout, there are obvious benefits for candidates who engage with these projects.

Who is involved?

All eight Wellington candidates have responded, along with twelve Auckland candidates and both the mayoral candidates for Palmerston North.

All the Mayoral candidates in Auckland, Palmerston North, and Wellington who have responded to our invitation to participate by 28 August 2016, and subsequently responded to our question pack— their responses inform the algorithm that underpins the game.

Who is supporting VoteLocal?

The project has strategic innovation funding from Massey University, sponsored by the College of Creative Arts Pro Vice-Chancellor Professor Claire Robinson. VoteLocal has external support from web development agency Springload, Internet New Zealand and The Innovation Partnership.

This project has also received support from the Council Democratic Services teams in Auckland, Palmerston North City, and Wellington— the three cities where VoteLocal will be available this year.

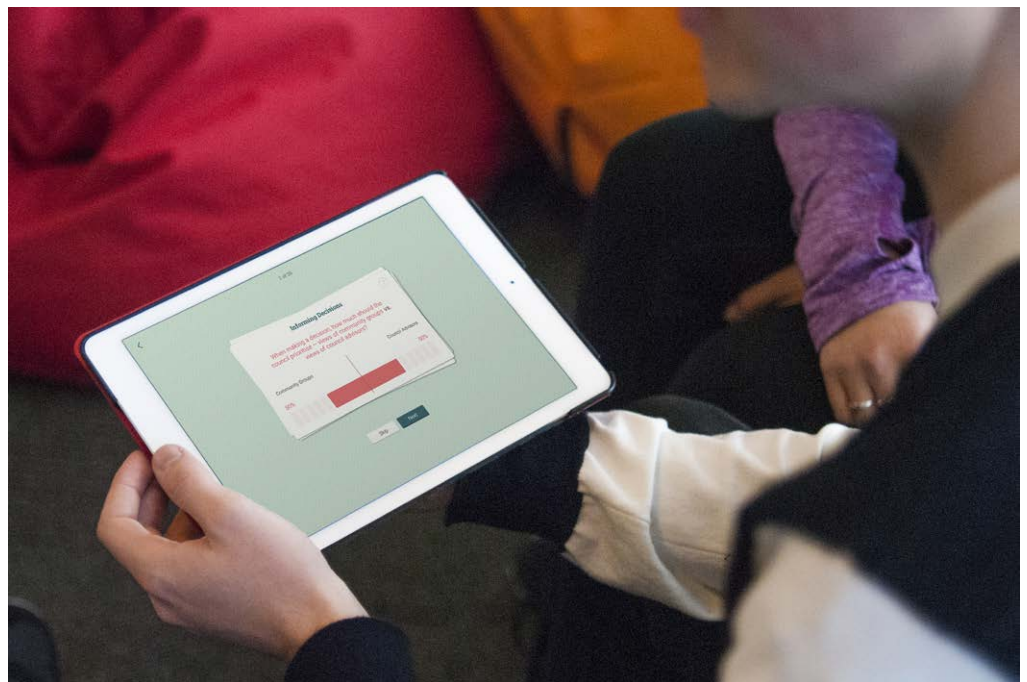
Why Auckland, Wellington and Palmerston North?

The Design+Democracy Project is running the initiative in three constituencies for this first iteration: Auckland, Wellington and Palmerston North. The three centres have been chosen for the following reasons:

- › The size of Palmerston North makes a suitable testing ground for future iterations in other smaller centres.
- › The size of Wellington makes a suitable testing ground for future iterations in other larger cities.
- › Auckland has been identified as an electorate where young voter turnout is particularly low and its demographics will make it a compelling challenge (for example, the particular low turnout among youth, Asian and Pasifika peoples).
- › All three offer the opportunity to collaborate and connect with students and experts at the three Massey University campuses in these regions.

What is the user's journey?

Users respond to a series of political issues using a sliding scale. An algorithm then correlates users' responses with candidates' positions to suggest which candidate is most compatible.



How did you choose the questions?

VoteLocal's questions draw off extensive research exploring voter participation, with special consideration to that published by Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ). The questions have been designed alongside leading political studies experts from Massey and Victoria universities, and with the help of the team at UMR NZ.

Why focus on the youth voter?

We focus on young New Zealanders as our research suggests it is the most effective long-term approach for increasing overall voter turnout because:

- › Citizens that vote at their first opportunity dramatically increase their likelihood of becoming lifelong voters.
- › Young voters have a positive behavioural influence on their non-voting family members.
- › The existing democratic mechanisms are 'okay' for most older voters; but Millennials expect a more direct, deliberative, values and issues based approach to civic life, and they need new tools to achieve that.

What is VoteLocal trying to fix?

Voter participation in local body elections has been in general decline over the past 25 years with national eligible voter turnout dropping to 41% in 2013. The statistics for young voters are even more alarming with only 37% of eligible 18-24 year olds voting (LGNZ 2013). With many more unenrolled, those figures might be understating the problem. VoteLocal addresses the main reasons young people don't vote in local elections, which are (Hercus, 2011):

- › Lack of knowledge about the candidates and what they stand for;
- › Lack of understanding about what councils do and an assumption that they aren't relevant;
- › Under exposure to political knowledge and awareness about the elections in general.

What is the approach to the problem?

VoteLocal is the only interactive platform that specifically addresses the needs of young undecided and first-time voters by helping them navigate the complexities of local government. The initiative applies user-centred processes to develop a digital interface that is familiar, and a vernacular that is accessible to a youth audience while maintaining the gravitas of the political content.

VoteLocal empowers young New Zealanders to help them become active civic participants by matching their personal values with candidates, and engaging them in issues that affect their communities in a non-threatening, independent, bi-partisan and decidedly user-friendly environment.

Why is this important and Massey University involved?

Massey University wants to address the complex issues facing New Zealand in the 21st Century. Key to this is to have people engaged in not only the conversations, but also the democratic processes. To thrive in this century and respond to its social, environmental, health, and scientific challenges we have to be adaptive, responsive and engaged as citizens. Young people are amongst the least engaged in the democratic process, with participation rates consistently around 30% below electors aged over fifty. En masse they are rejecting or system of voting – a system in large designed with 17th and 18th century European ideas on citizenship in mind.

Young people want dialogue – the Left vs Right paradigm doesn't work for them. They are interested in issues, solutions and policies that are values based.

Young people don't think politics addresses things they think are most important, and they lack confidence to know whether their vote is in fact aligned with their values.

We believe that the issue of low voter turnout is not the sole responsibility of government or council. It is one of that we all share as citizens. It is also one that benefits from multiple contributions working independently but in concert with each other.

Why does it matter whether young people vote or not?

The Design+Democracy Project project is fostering and advancing research that addresses a complex issue faced by New Zealanders – 21st Century citizenship.

The Design+Democracy Project has been exploring how to get young people engaged with political processes, and secondly, how to make them informed, confident participants in the democratic process of choosing their government representatives.

Informing and engaging with young people makes a vital contribution to the fabric of New Zealand's future. It responds to one of the central purposes of government, which is to consider the needs of future generations.

In developing VoteLocal, who has The Design+Democracy Project worked with?

The Design+Democracy Project has liaised with Local Government New Zealand, the Electoral Commission, Victoria University, the Innovation Partnership, Internet New Zealand, and UMR research.

Votelocal is developed and delivered with Springload—a pioneering New Zealand web design and development agency.