Using the Web

The Internet: Reach out to stakeholders in an open, thorough and sophisticated way - while reducing project costs...

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The web is a tool, an information tool. People typically utilize the web to disseminate information; to publish their ideas or to market their services. One of the greatest attributes of a website, however, is its interactivity. You can use the interactivity of a website to help you in all stages of the design process, including the initial stage of information gathering.

Pre-Project
Setting up a project website before the first community meeting has happened gives stakeholders a chance to become involved in the process from the very birth of it. By including a comment section with carefully worded questions, the job of information gathering can be made much easier. The designers can get a good sense of the history, of the wants and needs, and of the likes and dislikes of the stakeholders, and can come into the process with more contextual knowledge of the project area.

Using the web to gather information also makes it easier for a larger group of the stakeholders to become involved in this stage. The web has a far more flexible schedule than public meetings. Anyone can get online, at home, during downtime at work, at their local library, and can offer their unique interpretation of their community. And they can come back to the site and add more content anytime the inspiration hits them.

The Web as a Money Saver
The web is also an economical way to gather information. The cost of an interactive website is relatively low in comparison to other types of community-wide surveys such as door knocking or telephone surveys, and far less intrusive. Automation makes the categorizing of information received instantaneous and eliminates the need for staff members spending time doing it, freeing up their time for other project needs.

Information Gathering on the web can be integrated with other forms of information gathering, such as market research and site analysis to create a more complete picture of the project area. By inviting the stakeholders into the process early on in a non-intrusive way, it helps solidify stakeholder commitment to the success of the project. By gathering a wider range of information, the designers go into the project more knowledgeable and better able to produce a contextually relevant and product that is appropriate for the community.

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