

Sanna-Kaisa Saloranta, Kirsi Hantula,
Tiina Härkönen and Elina Eerola

EFFECTIVE USE OF THE VOXIT PLATFORM TO SUPPORT DECISION- MAKING

Sitra Memorandum

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Effective use of the Vokit platform to support decision-making

Authors: Sanna-Kaisa Saloranta, Kirsi Hantula, Tiina Härkönen and Elina Eerola
The authors are experts in Sitra's Democracy Innovations Programme.

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Foreword

Democratic decision-making is currently being challenged from many directions. In Finland, the sustainability of public finances is threatened by weak economic growth and an ageing population. At the same time, societal polarisation and cross-border crises – including geopolitical tensions and climate change – are eroding our collective capacity to make sound decisions. Our ability to cope and succeed will largely depend on how effectively our decision-making system can respond to the distressing problems in today's operating environment.

Experiences from Finland and abroad show that democratic innovations, for example digital participation platforms that lower the threshold for citizen engagement, can strengthen decision-making. When these platforms are used with thought in decision-making and policy preparation, the citizens' views can be incorporated meaningfully and with real impact.

Digital participation platforms enable decision-makers to gather valuable insights from citizens: an understanding of the pain points surrounding the issue at hand, proposals for solutions grounded in everyday experience, and fresh ideas. By engaging citizens digitally, decision-makers can also validate findings emerging from preparatory work or strengthen assessments of the impacts of forthcoming decisions. In this way, the citizen voice becomes an essential compass that guides decision-making towards more sustainable and widely accepted solutions.

In this memorandum, we present the lessons learned, in Finland to date, from using one such digital participation platform – the Voxit platform – as a tool to support decision-making. Previously known as Polis, this open-source platform was developed in the United States roughly a decade ago. Sitra introduced the platform in Finland in 2023 and, in collaboration with DigiFinland, developed an accessible, mobile-optimised version that meets European data protection requirements.

With growing experience, it has become clear that this low-threshold platform is particularly well suited to the early stages of decision-making processes. It supports constructive citizen dialogue and works well when there is a need to form a comprehensive situational picture and hear from many kinds of citizens.



We hope that this memorandum will encourage actors, both within public administration and across the civil society sector, to consider how digital participation, and the Voxit platform in particular, could help make their decision-making processes more about the citizens. This publication provides practical, hands-on information on the Voxit platform and designing and implementing Voxit citizen dialogues. It is intended to support both the experts responsible for delivering these dialogues and the decision-makers commissioning them.

Hannu-Pekka Ikäheimo

Project Director, Democracy Innovations Programme

Sitra

Summary

Citizen participation in the preparation and making of decisions can strengthen decision-making capacity and help achieve socially sustainable decisions. The prerequisite is that citizens can participate in the decision-making process at the right time and in a meaningful way. Therefore, it is important to thoroughly plan participation and choose the most suitable methods for the situation.

This memo provides guidance on the use of one digital participation method, the Voxit participation platform. Voxit is a low-threshold platform designed for the participation of large groups. The platform is particularly suitable for the early stages of decision-making when there is a need to deepen the shared situational understanding. On the platform, people discuss the chosen topic by voting on statements related to the topic and by proposing new statements for others to vote on. Participation is anonymous, easy, and fast, and trolling or online harassment are not possible.

The organisation of the Voxit participation process is divided into three important phases: planning the discussion, implementation, and analysis and reporting of the results. The final phase also includes evaluating the impacts of the Voxit process. The Voxit platform has already been widely used in Finland, especially in municipalities and wellbeing services counties.

This memo reviews the lessons learned from each phase of the Voxit discussion, based on experiences from discussions organised in Finland. The reader is given valuable tips on, among other things, implementing communication to support the Voxit discussion, moderating the discussion, and creating diverse analyses.

To ensure the impacts of the Voxit process, it is also important already at the planning stage to ensure that the process has a clear owner – a decision-maker or preparer who is committed to utilising the results of the Voxit discussion to support their work.

Tiivistelmä

Kansalaisten osallistuminen päätösten valmisteluun ja niiden tekoon voi vahvistaa päätöksentekokykyä ja auttaa tekemään sosiaalisesti kestäviä päätöksiä. Edellytyksenä on, että kansalaiset pääsevät osallistumaan päätöksentekoprosessiin oikeaan aikaan ja vaikuttavasti. Sen vuoksi on tärkeää suunnitella osallistuminen perinpohjaisesti ja valita tilanteeseen sopivimmat menetelmät.

Tässä muistiossa opastetaan yhden digitaalisen osallistumisen menetelmän, Voxit-osallistumisalustan käyttöön. Voxit on suurten joukkojen osallistumiseen suunniteltu matalan kynnyksen alusta. Alusta soveltuu erityisesti päätöksenteon alkuvaiheeseen, kun on tarve syventää yhteistä tilannekuvaa. Alustalla ihmiset keskustelevalt valitusta aiheesta äänestämällä aihepiiriä käsitteleviä väitteitä ja ehdottamalla muiden äänestettäviksi uusia väitteitä. Osallistuminen on anonyymiä, helppoa ja nopeaa, eikä trollaaminen tai verkkohäirintä ole mahdollista.

Voxit-osallistumisprosessin järjestäminen jakautuu kolmeen tärkeään työvaiheeseen: keskustelun suunnitteluun, toteutukseen sekä tulosten analyysiin ja raportointiin. Viimeiseen vaiheeseen kuuluu myös Voxit-prosessin vaikutusten arviointi. Voxit-alustaa on käytetty Suomessa jo laajasti varsinkin kunnissa ja hyvinvointialueilla. Tämän muistion sivuilla käydään läpi Voxit-keskustelun kutakin työvaihetta koskevia oppeja, joita Suomessa järjestetyistä keskusteluista on saatu. Lukijalle annetaan arvokkaita vinkkejä muun muassa Voxit-keskustelua tukevan viestinnän toteuttamisesta, keskustelun moderoinnista sekä monipuolisen analyysin laatimisesta.

Voxit-prosessin vaikutusten varmistamiseksi jo keskustelun suunnitteluvaiheessa on myös tärkeää varmistaa, että prosessilla on selkeä omistaja – päätöksentekijä tai valmistelija, joka on sitoutunut hyödyntämään Voxit-keskustelun tuloksia työnsä tukena.

Sammanfattning

Medborgarnas deltagande i beredningen och beslutsfattandet kan stärka beslutsförmågan och bidra till socialt hållbara beslut. Förutsättningen är att medborgarna får delta i beslutsprocessen vid rätt tidpunkt och på ett meningsfullt sätt. Därför är det viktigt att noggrant planera deltagandet och välja de mest lämpliga metoderna för olika ändamål.

Detta promemoria ger vägledning för användningen av en digital deltagandemetod, Voxit-deltagandepattformen. Voxit är en lågröskelplattform utformad för deltagande av stora grupper. Plattformen lämpar sig särskilt för beslutsprocessens inledande skede när det finns behov av att fördjupa den gemensamma lägesbilden. På plattformen diskuterar människor det valda ämnet genom att rösta på påståenden om ämnet och föreslå nya påståenden för andra att rösta på. Deltagandet är anonymt, enkelt och snabbt, och trolling eller nättrakasserier är inte möjliga.

Organiseringen av Voxit-deltagandeprocessen delas in i tre viktiga arbetsfaser: planering av diskussionen, genomförande samt analys och rapportering av resultaten. Till den sista fasen hör även utvärdering av Voxit-processens effekter. Voxit-plattformen har redan använts i stor utsträckning i Finland, särskilt i kommuner och välfärdsområden. På sidorna i detta promemoria gås igenom lärdomar från varje arbetsfas i Voxit-diskussionen, baserat på erfarenheter från diskussioner som ordnats i Finland. Läsaren får värdefulla tips bland annat om hur kommunikationen som stöder Voxit-diskussionen kan genomföras, om moderering av diskussionen samt om att skapa mångsidiga analyser.

För att säkerställa påverkan av Voxit-processen är det redan i planeringsskedet viktigt att försäkra att processen har en tydlig ägare – en beslutsfattare eller beredare som är engagerad i att använda resultaten från Voxit-diskussionen som stöd i sitt arbete.

1. Introduction to effective citizen participation

In a vibrant and well-functioning democracy, participation in decision-making is a fundamental right of citizens. When citizens are successfully brought into decision-making processes in a meaningful and timely manner, citizen participation becomes an invaluable resource for those making the decisions. When planned and executed well, citizen participation strengthens the knowledge base behind decisions and helps decision-makers reach more thorough and widely supported outcomes.

To achieve this, however, citizen participation must be planned and strategically managed. This requires identifying the different stages of decision-making processes, the key windows of opportunity for influence, and the nature of the issues under consideration. Doing so helps to avoid tokenistic participation that undermines citizens' trust in public administration and in their own ability to influence matters. Tokenistic engagement also consumes the limited resources available for citizen participation.

There are many methods of participation, and it is essential to choose the most appropriate and effective method for each situation. In Finnish municipalities and wellbeing services counties, the decision-making process typically progresses – from an initiative or issue being brought forward – to preparation, decision-making, implementation and evaluation. At each of these stages, citizens can be engaged in different ways. For instance, building a situational picture, preparing, making and executing decisions, and assessing their effects all require at least partially different participation methods.

In addition to the decision-making process itself, the choice of the participation method is shaped by factors such as the significance and scope of the decision, as well as the objective set for citizen participation. One should ask if the aim is to improve citizens' understanding of the matter under consideration? Or is the intention to co-develop a concept or service with citizens, or to seek a mandate from citizens to proceed with decision-making?

Once these elements are clearly understood, it becomes easier to identify which methods of citizen participation will be most effective and most appropriate for the decision-making process at hand.

Digital participation platforms and in-person methods each have distinct strengths

Digital participation platforms are digital services designed according to the principles of constructive interaction, with the aim of lowering the threshold for participation and making it easier for citizens to contribute. In the following chapters we will examine one such platform, Voxit.

A key advantage of digital participation platforms, compared with methods based on physical meetings, is that large numbers of people can participate regardless of time or place. Their use aims to ensure that decision-making better reflects the voices of those who are not among the most socially active. Participation on such platforms is often anonymous, enabling sensitive topics to be discussed. Topics that people might not feel comfortable addressing face to face or under their own name. Statistical techniques – and increasingly artificial intelligence – are used to build an overall picture from complex participant data and to generate summaries and visualisations that support understanding.

The main advantage of methods based on in-person engagement is that they allow participants to delve more deeply into issues together, to learn collectively, to weigh different options, or to explore the root causes of problems. Examples include deliberative citizens' panels and various forms of facilitated dialogue.

In general terms, citizens should be offered both digital methods and methods based on physical interaction, so that participation is accessible to all people, regardless of their age, place of residence or level of prior knowledge.

2. The basics of the Voxit platform

What is the Voxit platform?

Voxit is a low-threshold digital participation platform that enables large groups of people to take part in decision-making. Based on open-source technology, the platform is an easy-to-use tool that allows decision-makers and those involved in policy preparation to gather the views of a broad audience – for example the residents of a municipality or the staff of an organisation. The resulting insights strengthen decision-makers' understanding of the issue at hand and improve the evidence base underpinning decisions.

Voxit discussions can be joined using mobile devices or computers. Participants vote on statements related to the chosen topic. They may also propose their own statements, thereby ensuring that the perspectives they consider important are brought into the discussion.

Statements proposed on the platform may be colloquial or include dialectal expressions – participants have the right to raise issues they consider important and express their views in their own language variant. The platform encourages citizens to make their voices heard and helps illustrate that any given topic can be viewed from many angles.

The platform produces real-time data on how participants are voting on each statement. For instance, the live results report shows which statements attract broad agreement and which provoke the strongest divergence of opinion. Using advanced statistical methods, the platform also groups participants into different opinion clusters based on their voting behaviour. An analysis according to a group reveals nuanced differences between the clusters as well as issues on which all groups share a common ground.

In Finland, several technical service providers enable public authorities and other organisations interested in Voxit to easily adopt the platform as a service. Organisations using the platform may also purchase various add-on services, such as customising the visual appearance of the Voxit user interface to suit their organisation.

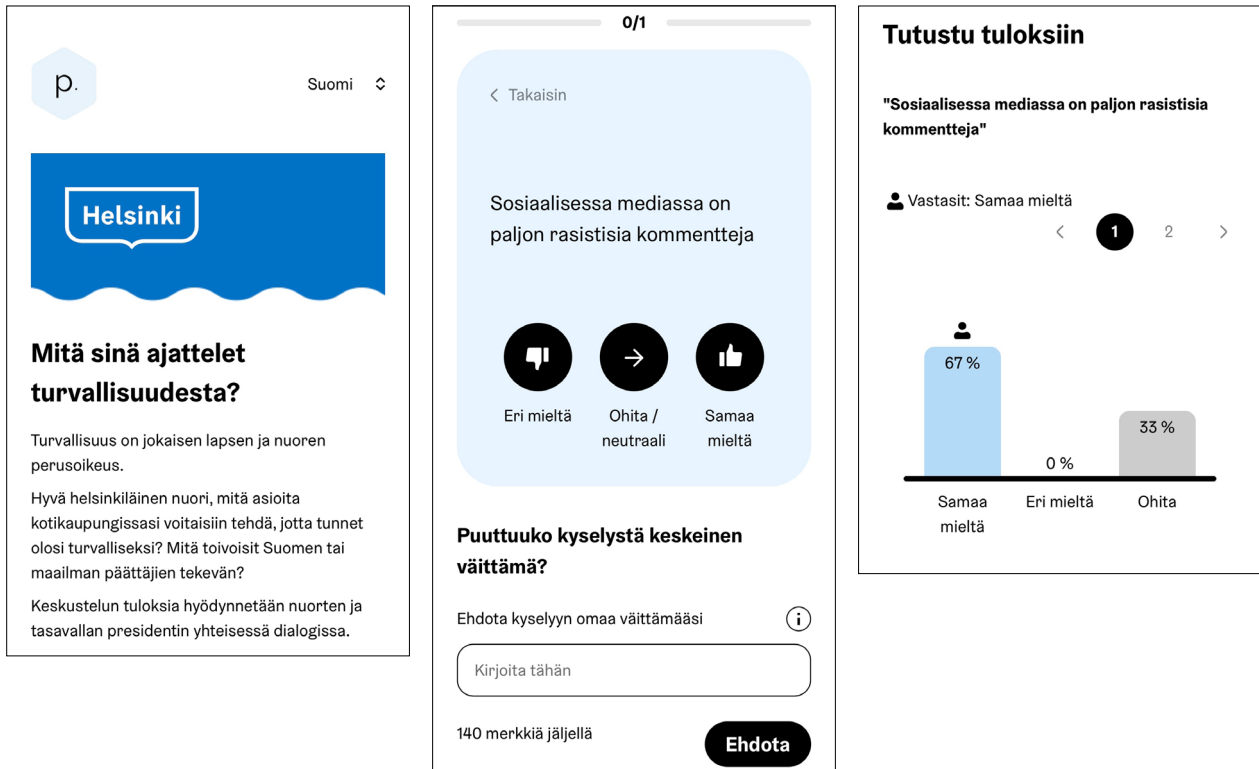
In the mid-2010s, the Computational Democracy Project in the United States released the open-source Polis platform. Sitra introduced the platform in Finland in 2023 and further developed it to meet the needs of the Finnish public administration, in collaboration with DigiFinland. In 2025, Finland decided to discontinue technical alignment with the original Polis platform. At the same time, in Finland the name of the platform was changed to Voxit – partly because in a bilingual country the name *Polis* repeatedly caused confusion and misunderstanding as in Swedish it means “police (officer)”.

Voxit in a nutshell

- Voxit is a lowthreshold participation solution designed for constructive dialogue among large groups.
- Participation is quick and easy: users vote on published statements by agreeing, disagreeing or skipping.
- Trolling and online harassment do not occur, as commenting on or sharing other users' contributions – familiar from social media – is disabled.
- Participation is possible on a computer, tablet or smartphone, at any time and from any location, as Voxit is fully optimised for mobile devices.
- The platform includes a translation tool, enabling people who speak different languages to take part in the same discussion.
- Participation is anonymous and does not require a user account or login. The only information collected is the IP address of the device, used solely to recognise the participant so that the same statements are not shown repeatedly. The platform can still be used even if the IP address is hidden.

Image 1: Voxit user interface

The Voxit platform's simple user interface works on a smartphone, tablet and computer. The screenshots (in Finnish) are from a safetythemed discussion organised by the City of Helsinki and Sitra in spring 2025.



Voxit is not a survey tool

What distinguishes Voxit from traditional survey tools is its underlying principle: giving citizens greater agency.

With survey tools, the organisation publishing the survey retains the power to define the scope of the questionnaire – what is addressed and how it is framed. The assumption is that the organisation already has a sufficiently comprehensive understanding of the topic to determine what should be included and what can be excluded.

Voxit takes a different approach. The organisation launching a Voxit discussion simply sets the direction by publishing a set of 10–20 initial statements. These seed and background statements provide the starting point for the discussion.

Background statements allow the organiser to monitor whether the discussion is reaching the intended target groups. Seed statements introduce the chosen theme and help shape the tone of the discussion, raising initial perspectives relevant to the topic.

Once the participants begin proposing their own statements, often entirely new viewpoints emerge, revealing perspectives the organiser might never have considered. The participants' statements may refine or correct the original seed statements or even shift the conversation in unexpected directions. The content of a Voxit discussion therefore evolves continuously as participants add new statements. This strengthens their agency in defining and shaping the topic.

Unlike most surveys, Voxit does not require participants to complete anything in full. A participant can leave the discussion and return later, even multiple times. Every single click enriches the dataset. After a participant has voted on at least seven statements, the platform can place them into one of the opinion groups forming within the discussion.

When to choose Voxit?

Voxit is best used in the early stages of a decision-making process, when the objective is to build a more comprehensive situational picture. Voxit's real-time results help decision-makers and those preparing policies understand which issues prompt consensus and which divide opinion.

It is particularly well suited to exploring new or rapidly evolving phenomena. In the age of social media, a loud and polarised minority can disproportionately dominate public attention. Decision-makers may then struggle to judge whether these views reflect wider public opinion.

Voxit offers a solution: because participation is quick and effortless, it attracts not only the most vocal or politically active individuals, but a wider

and more diverse group of citizens. This yields a richer and more accurate understanding of the topic. The anonymity of the platform also allows addressing sensitive issues.

To reach citizens who are harder to engage, the entire Voxit process must nonetheless be carefully designed with target groups' needs and characteristics in mind.

When is Voxit not the best choice?

Although Voxit can support many decision-making processes, it is not suitable for every purpose.

Voxit should not be chosen to engage a small group – fewer than 100 people. Typically, around one in ten participants proposes a statement, so a larger user base is needed for the citizens' voice to emerge clearly.

Likewise, Voxit does not work well if it is essential that all participants have sufficient or equal background knowledge of the topic. At the time of writing, it is not technically possible to present background materials directly within the discussion view. Because login or authentication is not required, the organiser cannot restrict participation to those who already have deeper expertise.

Future development could enable stronger digital identification, more detailed participant data, or the integration of background materials (for example videos) via linked surveys. Voxit could also be integrated into closed organisational systems. These features would allow for more selective participation and improve communication with interested participants. However, every additional step before entering the discussion significantly reduces participation. Such developments must be approached carefully and with continued citizen involvement – after all, Voxit's strength lies in its ease of use.

If the aim is to engage citizens in digitally facilitated co-design, idea formation or prioritisation of alternatives, other digital participation platforms may be more suitable. Voxit deliberately focuses on voting on statements and proposing new ones, keeping participation light, quick and constructive. This design does not support more advanced interpersonal dialogue.

For the same reason, Voxit may need to be combined with more interactive methods when seeking solutions to particularly entrenched conflicts. In such cases, Voxit can provide an effective first step: it helps decision-makers identify the topics that generate the greatest disagreement. Combining Voxit with methods that encourage deeper reflection on other perspectives can help move towards satisfactory solutions.

Examples of suitable deeper-engagement methods that can be combined with Voxit include face-to-face, multi-perspective roundtable discussions or deliberative citizens' panels. It is important to remember that such methods require careful planning, facilitation and resourcing to ensure high-quality and meaningful dialogue.

3. Organising a meaningful and constructive Voxit discussion requires time and resources

The Voxit platform is not only technically easy to use for participants, it is also straightforward for those organising the discussion. A Voxit discussion can be created and published on the platform in as little as half an hour.

However, to attract a sufficient and appropriate number of participants and to ensure that the results feed into decision-making at the right moment, it is advisable to allocate enough time – at least 60 to 90 days – for planning and delivering a Voxit discussion.

It is common, especially among organisations running their first Voxit discussion, to underestimate the amount of time needed for preparation, such as planning the communications that support the Voxit discussion.

Before planning and implementation begin, it is also important to ensure that there are sufficient resources to carry out the discussion. The delivery team should include at least a project coordinator, a moderator and a communications specialist, although in practice one person may take on multiple roles. For instance, the project coordinator and moderator are often the same person.

Project coordinator

- Prepares, coordinates and schedules the Voxit planning
- Monitors progress towards the objectives set for the discussion
- Is responsible for finalising the topic and descriptive text, and for drafting the seed and background statements
- Analyses the discussion and brings in any additional experts needed for the analysis phase

Communications specialist

- Selects communication channels based on target groups
- Produces communication materials and translations, updates websites
- Publishes communications across selected channels
- Monitors background statements from the perspective of target group reach
- Prepares follow-up communications with the coordinator, such as a public statement or summary for decision-makers and participants

Moderator

- Ensures that the discussion is moderated carefully, fairly and actively enough
- Enhances the participant experience and increases engagement
- Maintains an overview of what is being discussed on the platform
- Monitors the feedback box and reports feedback

The implementation of a Voxit discussion can broadly be divided into three phases: planning, delivery and analysis and impact assessment.

In the planning phase, communications are designed and links to the relevant decision-making processes are established. The delivery phase begins with the publication of the seed and background statements. During this phase, the organiser must also moderate the discussion. Once the discussion closes, the process moves to analysis, reporting and finally to assessing the impacts. Each of these phases – along with the associated tasks – is described in the following chapters.

EXAMPLE

The North Karelia Wellbeing Services County deepened its understanding of clients' challenges with mental health and substance use

In 2024, the North Karelia Wellbeing Services County noticed that they needed to update their understanding of the challenges faced by clients struggling with mental health and substance use issues. Client encounters had revealed that many residents lacked knowledge about how to access services or which organisations provided them. To identify the root causes, the wellbeing services county used both the Voxit platform and a solution-focused roundtable discussion.

The Voxit discussion showed that family members of people with mental health and substance use issues do not receive enough support or information. Participants also highlighted that significant societal stigma still surrounds these issues in North Karelia. The effects of this stigma – for example on people's willingness to seek help – had not previously been fully recognised. This insight was taken into a multi-perspective roundtable discussion with stakeholders, where the issue was further examined.

At the end of the process, a public statement was produced and presented to the committee for the promotion of wellbeing and health. It was shared with the regional council, advisory bodies and local municipalities, leading to extensive practical measures and the development of a long-term support model for mental health. A region-wide mental health campaign was launched, training in mental health and substance use work was expanded, and expertise in treatment pathways, service coordination and client guidance was strengthened, among others.

EXAMPLE

The City of Kouvola updated its strategy by engaging residents through Voxit

In Kouvola, the city's strategy for the next council term was updated following the 2025 municipal elections. The aim was to closely involve residents in shaping the strategy so that the new council's priorities would reflect the aspirations of the local people. To support this, the city launched a discussion on the future of Kouvola using the Voxit platform. A total of 644 residents took part in the discussion *"What is the future Kouvola like for you?"*

The analysis revealed that the residents consider Kouvola's natural environment – its diverse nature and walking trails – to be one of the city's key strengths. Kouvola was also seen as a safe place to live, offering a variety of housing options. Conversely, opportunities for further education after comprehensive school, job prospects across different sectors and the city's attractiveness for entrepreneurs were viewed as insufficient.

The results were discussed in the City Board and City Council, and the issues highlighted by residents influenced the formulation of the updated strategy. The new strategy includes objectives related to entrepreneurship, job creation and skills, also addressing concerns raised in the Voxit discussion about employment and study opportunities.

EXAMPLE

The President of the Republic engaged with young people on security

In a rapidly changing security environment, Finnish decision-makers increasingly need a more nuanced understanding of how citizens experience their own safety. In spring 2025, President Alexander Stubb and his office sought to explore how secure young people in Finland feel in their daily lives and what they think about the security of Finland and Europe.

For the President, it was important that young people could express their views in their own words and on their own terms. Therefore, the Office of the President, Sitra and the City of Helsinki organised a Voxit discussion for lower secondary school pupils. There were around 170 student participants from five Helsinki schools. The discussion produced a rich dataset and, an analysis showed that young people fell into three distinct groups based on their experiences of security. These groups differed, among others, in their attitudes towards equality and their assessment of their own everyday safety.

At the end of the process, the results of the Voxit discussion were used as background material when the President held an in-person dialogue with a group of young people at a Helsinki school. Based on these positive experiences, a model was developed to help other decision-makers engage young people in important societal issues using a similar combination of Voxit and facilitated dialogue.

4. Planning a Voxit discussion

Linking the discussion to decision-making

Once the decision to organise a Voxit discussion has been made, the next step is to ensure that the discussion will have real influence. From this perspective, it is essential that the Voxit process has a clear owner from the outset. Typically, the owner is either a decision-maker or a policy preparer who intends to use the results of the Voxit discussion in their work.

When preparations for the Voxit process begin, the priority is to ensure that the process owner, whether a preparer or a decision-maker, has a sufficient understanding of Voxit as a method. At this stage, the organiser of the Voxit discussion and the process owner should also jointly agree on the approach to implementation and on the boundaries of the topic.

The next step is to define the objective of the discussion together. This also ensures that the process owner – a key figure in the success of the Voxit discussion – is genuinely committed. The objective should be formulated in such a way that the results are clearly linked to real decision-making. For example, if a municipality wishes to give residents the opportunity to influence a new strategy under preparation, it should be the starting point for the Voxit discussion. Together with the process owner, the organiser should explore how citizen insights collected through Voxit will feed into the overall strategy process.

The objective of the Voxit discussion is formed on this basis, linking results to the strategy process at the right moment and clarifying the goal with concrete sub-objectives and clear indicators that leave no room for ambiguity.

When planning the intended impact of the Voxit discussion, it may be useful to refer to a process description of the decision-making cycle or to the organisation's annual planning calendar. This makes it easier to identify the stages at which residents' views can genuinely influence the content of decisions. Tools such as the administrative rules of the wellbeing services county or municipality, or their strategy for resident participation and engagement, can also support impact planning. Many counties and municipalities also have dedicated participation programmes that guide the use of citizen engagement methods.

In addition to the process owner, the topic and implementation of the Voxit discussion will likely involve other important stakeholders, either within the organisation or externally. These stakeholders must be identified early in the preparation phase and involved in the process in good time. Contacts with stakeholder groups are particularly valuable when ensuring

that the discussion reaches the right participants. For example, organisations or associations linked to the discussion theme may help reach the intended target groups.

Formulating the impact promise

Once the objective has been defined and key stakeholders have been engaged, it is time to formulate an impact promise: a concise statement for participants that explains how their contributions will be used. This should also be prepared together with the process owner, remembering that the ultimate responsibility for integrating the results into decision-making lies with the owner and, more broadly, with the administration.

The impact promise summarises how and to what extent the participants' views will influence decision-making. It also helps to shape the analysis and communication that follow the discussion.

Even though it is often difficult to predict the precise impact of participation in advance, the impact promise should describe as concretely as possible what consequences citizen participation will have. For example, in a municipal strategy discussion, residents might be given an impact promise such as:

“The residents’ views will be compared with the current priorities of the municipal strategy and considered when drafting the new strategy. Once the strategy has been approved, we will report back to the residents on the result and explain how, and to what extent, their views were incorporated.”

The impact promise does not need to be published as such. It is primarily an internal tool for the Voxit organiser, a way to define why residents are being invited to participate and how their input will be used. These points should be communicated to residents at the very beginning, when the Voxit discussion is launched and supporting communications begin.

Communication about the impact of participation should continue even after the Voxit discussion closes. This strengthens transparency and public trust in decision-making. It is important to report the impacts even when their influence is subtle or difficult to measure.

Planning communications

Once the link between the Voxit discussion and decision-making is clear, the planning of communications can begin. This phase should be given sufficient time. Active communication across multiple channels is key to sparking interest and motivating people to take part.

For this reason, each Voxit discussion should have its own communication plan outlining key messages, channels, actions, timing and responsibilities.

It is also important to remember that communication must continue throughout the entire Voxit process – before, during and after the discussion. In practice, communications planning always goes hand in hand with scheduling the discussion. The Voxit discussions are typically open for three to four weeks, but participants can propose new statements only during the first half. Communication to participants therefore naturally divides into three phases.

- **Phase 1:** guide participants to propose new statements and vote.
- **Phase 2:** once new statements can no longer be added, encourage participants to vote on all published statements.
- **Phase 3:** after the discussion closes, thank participants and explain how their contributions will influence decision-making.

The complexity of the topic and the desired number of participants also influence the communication approach.

Communications must also be prepared to respond quickly to unexpected developments during the Voxit discussion, for example if the topic suddenly attracts wide public attention outside the platform. In such cases, the project coordinator and communications specialist should consider whether this external interest can be channelled back into constructive engagement on the Voxit platform.

Tips for Voxit organisers – communicate across multiple channels

Communication supporting a Voxit discussion should be planned from the start with the target audience in mind. The aim should be to make access to the discussion as smooth as possible and to ensure that essential information is easy to find.

- Gather all key information about the Voxit discussion in one place on your organisation's website. When the discussion opens, there should be a direct link from the Voxit platform to this page.
- In addition to your own website, consider using other channels to promote the discussion, such as a press release, social media or traditional media.
- Local media may be particularly interested in covering a Voxit discussion, especially if the topic is already part of public debate. Collaboration with local media should also continue after the discussion ends so that the results and analysis receive adequate visibility.
- A recommendation from a participant is the most convincing form of endorsement. Encourage participants, both on the platform and in your communication materials, to spread the word and invite others to take part.
- The feedback box is an optional but often useful feature. Through it, participants can comment on the platform experience, the flow of the discussion or report technical issues.

5. Implementing a Voxit discussion

Preparing the topic description, background statements and seed statements

The implementation phase of a Voxit discussion begins when the discussion is published for participants. To ensure a good start, the organiser first prepares around 15–20 seed and background statements to initiate the discussion and writes the topic description that will appear on the Voxit platform.

In the participant interface, the topic description appears immediately below the discussion title. It is a concise text of a few lines that clarifies the scope of the topic defined in the title. Clear topic delimitation is one of the most important elements of a successful Voxit discussion. The topic must be defined precisely enough to focus the conversation on the platform, support moderation and guide the analysis of the results.

The topic description published in the discussion view usually also indicates who is organising the Voxit discussion and why citizens are being consulted. It also guides participants to further information on the organiser's website.

Seed statements are topic-related, statement-form sentences that kick off the discussion. They must be clear and easy to understand, and they must be phrased so that participants can agree or disagree with them.

Time should be invested in the formulation of seed statements, as they influence the direction and tone of the discussion. It is important to ensure that the seed statements represent a variety of viewpoints. The aim should be to include statements likely to generate both agreement and disagreement among participants. In drafting them, it is advisable to consult experts to avoid factual inaccuracies.

Example of seed statements from Sitra's 2025 Voxit discussion for lower secondary school pupils on safety and feelings of security.

At the start of the discussion, a total of 23 seed statements were published on the Voxit platform. Of these, 17 were written in Finnish and three in Swedish, as the participants included both Finnish- and Swedish-speaking pupils.

1. Women should also be required to complete military service in Finland.
2. I am worried about Europe's security.

3. I trust that Finland is well prepared for different types of crises.
4. The number of police officers or security guards should be increased in places where many young people spend time.
5. A prerequisite for a safe Finland is that we respect one another's diversity.

Background statements must also be written in statement form. They can be used to gather information on participants' age or gender distribution, place of residence or educational background.

During the discussion, they help the organiser monitor whether the desired target groups are being reached. If participation in a particular target group appears too low, the organiser can respond by increasing targeted communication while the discussion is still open.

Example of background statements from Sitra's 2023 national "What do you think, Finland?" discussion

1. I live in a city with more than 50,000 inhabitants
2. I am under 35 years old
3. I am a member of a political party
4. I have a higher education degree

Moderating the discussion

Once the Voxit discussion begins, moderation starts. Active moderation allows the organiser to support a diverse and effective citizen dialogue. Successful moderation amplifies the participants' voices, improves their experience and increases the quality of the results.

In Voxit discussions, the project coordinator usually also serves as a moderator. In addition, it is advisable to have at least one other person available for moderation. This ensures that the moderation can continue even if the coordinator falls ill or must attend to other urgent tasks.

A two-person moderation team is also better able to respond flexibly if the platform suddenly experiences a spike in participation and many new statements are submitted. For a discussion with a few hundred participants, moderation typically requires no more than an hour or two per day, although the workload increases with participant numbers.

Moderation can be challenging, and it is wise to prepare for this. Although moderators have clear moderation rules to guide them, they must still interpret how to apply those rules to individual proposed statements. The work becomes easier when moderators can discuss borderline cases with colleagues or subject-matter experts.

Moderation decisions to make before the discussion begins

Moderation is much easier when all key decisions about moderation resources and practices have been collectively made before the Voxit discussion opens.

Moderation resources

- Decide the specific days and times when moderation take place and communicate this on your website under the section describing the Voxit discussion. A good practice is to review submitted statements once or twice per day during the work week.

Timing of moderation

- Keep in mind that moderation is only needed while participants can still propose new statements — usually the first half of the discussion period.

Pre- or post-moderation?

- Do the statements appear on the platform immediately (post-moderation), or do they enter a moderation queue and are published only after review (pre-moderation)? In most cases, pre-moderation is recommended to keep the discussion manageable.

Target number of statements and related scheduling

- Depending on the size of the target group, timeline and communication efforts, the target might be 50–250 participant-submitted statements. This target must be monitored actively in the moderation view once the discussion begins.

Moderation rules

- Prepare clear and transparent rules defining the boundaries of acceptable discussion. Publish them on your website together with other Voxit information.

Moderation style

- Agree on shared moderation practices. For example, is colloquial language be allowed in statements? Are spelling errors acceptable?

Handling provocative statements

- Participants may occasionally propose strong or provocative statements that moderators may find uncomfortable. Such statements should not be dismissed unless they are clearly offensive or hostile. Instead, they should be viewed as potentially valuable signals – showing how widely certain views are held or how they relate to other ideas within specific opinion groups.

Table 1: Moderator's worksheet

When moderating a Voxit discussion, a shared worksheet used by the moderators is helpful. It allows moderators to maintain a shared understanding of the statements published and rejected on the Voxit platform.

Published statement ID of (from result report)	Statement (examples)	Statement type	Published statement ordinal number	Theme 1: Everyday means of transport	Theme 2: Cycling	Theme 3: Urban culture
0	I am under 30 years old	Background statement	1			
1	I hope that cycle paths are sanded yearround.	Seed statement	2		1	
2	Wide and safe pedestrian paths show that an area is childfriendly.	Seed statement	3			1
3	Fast electric scooters on cycle paths are really scary.	Participant statement	4		1	
6	As a cyclist, I always get angry looks, even if I follow cycling rules while biking in shared public spaces.	Participant statement	5			1
			Total:	Total:	Total:	Total:

6. Analysing a Voxit discussion and assessing its impact

Analysing and reporting the results

The starting point for analysing a Voxit discussion is always the real-time results report, generated automatically from the discussion data. The report provides a quick overview of the number of participants and their level of activity. It allows the analyst to immediately see which issues attract broad consensus, and which generate more divided opinions. The analysis is further supported by the opinion groups created by the platform, based on participants' voting behaviour. The results report enables examination of the differences and similarities between these groups.

Once the analyst has familiarised themselves with the results report and gained a good initial understanding of the Voxit data, they can refine and deepen their analysis using the tips below. It is helpful to remember that, as a participation method, Voxit sits somewhere between qualitative and quantitative research.

This affects the analytical approach: the results are formed equally from both the numerical voting data and the qualitative content of the statements. The analysis will be incomplete if the analyst focuses solely on the numbers or solely on the content.

Sometimes a single statement added by a participant can reveal a previously overlooked but highly significant perspective or experience – one that others unexpectedly share!

Summarise the key findings for the decision-makers

When the analysis is complete, it is time to prepare a presentation of the results for the decision-makers. The presentation should focus on key insights, as decision-makers may not have time to review all data. What should they absolutely know about the discussion and its outcomes?

The presentation should summarise the key message and a few central supporting findings. It is also advisable to describe the opinion groups and the differences between them.

It is generally recommended to use Voxit’s automatically generated data visualisations sparingly – or omit them – so that the decision-makers can focus on the content and results rather than the graphics.

Example structure for the presentation

1. Summary: Key findings.
2. What did the Voxit discussion aim to achieve and why?
3. Key indicators from the discussion.
4. What did the participants want to discuss?
5. How were opinions distributed across statements?
6. Opinion groups and the bridge statements uniting them.
7. Organiser’s observations.
8. Further information about the Voxit method.

7 Steps for analysing Voxit discussion data

1. Revisit the objectives

Not everything needs to be analysed. Revisit the objectives set for the Voxit discussion and clarify what insights you want to extract from the large dataset.

2. Show the key indicators from the discussion

Give an overview of the scale and activity level of the discussion, demonstrating citizen engagement with the following indicators:

- How many people took part? Was the participation target reached?
- How many votes were cast in total?
- How many seed statements did the organisers publish to start the discussion?
- How many statements were added by participants?

3. Describe the composition and representativeness of the discussion

Decision-makers need a general understanding of who participated and which target groups were reached most successfully. These insights come from the background statements. However, it is important to note that Voxit does not function like a survey tool. It is not possible to sort participants into separate groups based on background statements and compare their voting behaviours. In Voxit, the foundation of the analysis lies in the opinion groups formed by the platform.



4. Categorise or theme the data in line with the objectives

The statements proposed by citizens usually include a wide variety of perspectives, concerns, solution ideas, principles and wishes. One way to analyse these citizen statements more deeply is to group them into meaningful thematic categories. Once categorised, the analysis can explore questions such as:

- Which concerns divide participants?
- Which proposed solutions are supported across all opinion groups?
- Which themes generated the highest number of statements submitted by citizens?

Listing the most common themes in order of frequency provides a concrete picture of what participants most want to talk about given the opportunity to discuss a topic freely.

5. Describe, elaborate on and name the opinion groups

Focus on the opinion groups generated by the platform. Begin by examining how many groups emerged and how large they are. Then analyse each group's unique voting patterns in relation to the statements. Also note whether any group has an unusually high or low number of participants agreeing with specific background statements.

Give the opinion groups clear, descriptive names and characterise them in a way that helps decision-makers understand the relationships between the groups and the overall landscape of the discussion. You may wish to enliven your description with direct quotes from the statements that highlight differences between groups.

6. Highlight the “bridge statements” that unite groups

Once group differences have been described, examine where the groups share a common ground. Pay particular attention to “bridge statements” – statements that most participants in all opinion groups agree on. These may include, for example, a solution proposal that unexpectedly receives broad cross-group support. Bridge statements can offer an important starting point for building shared understanding even in polarised situations.

7. Contextualise and present your own observations

Interpret your findings in relation to other available sources, such as expert analyses or previous surveys. What surprising, contradictory or significant insights emerge when compared to other data? Which earlier findings do the Voxit results confirm or deepen? Where do they diverge?

Explain the wider societal context in which the discussion took place and reflect on how this is visible in the results. Did any current local or regional events influence the statements proposed by citizens? Did the media pick up on the discussion topic, and how was it presented in news coverage during the Voxit process?

Finally, complement the analysis with your own observations as the organiser. For example, consider the statements that were moderated out – do they point to similar themes as those included in the discussion?

7. Impact assessment and follow-up

An effective and meaningful Voxit process should always conclude with an assessment of its impacts. Evaluation is an essential part of the process for at least two reasons. Systematically conducted impact assessment provides the basis for developing future Voxit processes in a long-term and goal-oriented manner. It reveals the aspects that still require improvement so that the organisation can make increasingly effective use of the Voxit platform to support decision-making.

It is also important to gather and combine information from Voxit process evaluations with insights from other participation methods used within the organisation. When an organisation systematically collects data on the impact of its engagement methods, citizen participation can be developed by examining its effects, perceived meaningfulness and the extent to which participation opportunities are realised. Monitoring participation also provides information about how well engagement activities support the organisation in achieving its strategic objectives.

All this information is essential when making the case for why citizen participation should be strengthened or why further investment is needed. Only by comparing different participation methods – their reach, resource requirements and outcomes – can citizen participation be managed and developed strategically.

Evaluating a Voxit discussion: measuring influence on decision-making

A Voxit discussion should always be linked to a policy preparation or decision-making process. For this reason, its impacts should primarily be assessed from these perspectives.

Other relevant indicators include those that help improve the participation process from the citizens' point of view or facilitate comparison between Voxit and other engagement methods used in the organisation.

Examples of indicators related to decision-making processes and decision-making culture

- Effects on administrative or political decisions
- Effects on preparation of decisions
- Effects on decision-making culture
- Effects on organisational competence or capability in digital citizen participation
- Effects on the organisation's decision-making processes and structures

Examples of indicators related to the delivery of the Voxit process

- Number of work hours used in key stages
- Costs incurred (for example platform procurement, service provider costs, communication costs)
- Participant count and added statements
- Target group demographics vs actual participant demographics
- Feedback received from the discussion

How can the Voxit platform be taken into use?

In Finland, several service providers already offer the Voxit platform as a service to public authorities and civil society organisations. As Voxit is open-source software, organisations also have the option to install it on their own servers.

Up-to-date information on service providers offering Voxit is available through the open-source Voxit community. Founded in 2025, the community coordinates ongoing development of the Voxit platform to meet the needs of administrations in Finland and elsewhere in Europe. The community is coordinated by the Finnish Centre for Open Systems and Solutions (COSS).

Membership of the Voxit community is open to technical service providers as well as organisations using the platform – both from the public sector and civil society. Membership does not require technical expertise.

SITRa

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SITRA.FI

Itämerenkatu 11-13

PO BOX 160

00181 Helsinki

Phone: +358 294 618 991