



CONSUL

open participation



Open Software for Citizen Participation

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

There are cities that are governed by their citizens. Cities where people, together with their governments, debate and propose the best solutions for society, and which ones they want to move forward with. This is possible with Consul - a major international project designed by institutions responsible for citizen participation.

Consul is the most comprehensive digital tool for citizen participation. It was developed together by governments and citizens worldwide. It is an open source digital platform allowing any institution to freely use and modify it.

Consul is used by millions of people in some of the major capital cities of the world such as Paris, Madrid and Buenos Aires, as well as dozens of towns and regions across the globe. Already more than €200m has been spent on initiatives that people considered important enough for their cities to introduce.

It is the only tool that empowers and enables all types of participatory processes undertaken by institutions around the world: citizen's proposals, debates, participatory budgeting, collaborative legislation, interviews and surveys, voting, etc. And a further benefit is that it can easily be adapted to the needs of each institution.

With Consul, both citizens and administrations have a secure and reliable environment where they can participate. And they have an added advantage - all the institutions that use Consul form part of the same work network; a community of users who share experiences, best practices and knowledge. Thanks to the input from this community, Consul is constantly growing and improving, evolving to become an even better platform for citizen participation.

WHAT IS CONSUL?



BENEFITS AND ADVANTAGES OF WORKING WITH CONSUL

Consul is the most advanced tool developed to promote digital democracy.

Benefits

With Consul you can:

- 1. Set up any type of participation process used by governments around the world.
- 2. Allow citizens to participate in the most important and day-to-day decisions of institutions.
- 3. Put in place participation initiatives quickly and efficiently, with hardly any extra resources.
- 4. Adapt the participation processes to the needs of each institution.
- 5. Learn from the experience of all the other institutions that use Consul.
- 6. Adapt, improve and propose new developments that could benefit all the Consul Community members.

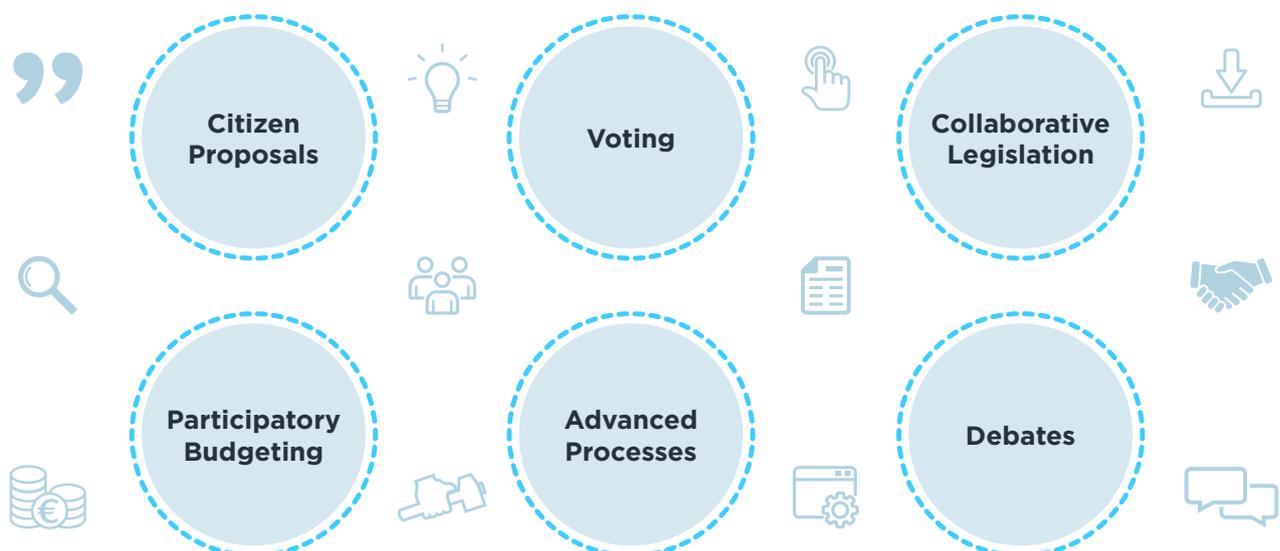
Advantages

Reasons why Consul is the best option:

- 1. **Free**
As it is an open software platform all its code can be used by any person or entity.
- 2. **Customisable**
Any entity can freely modify it to suit its requirements.
- 3. **Continuously being updated**
Consul customers can suggest improvements, new features and functionalities to ensure its evolution.
- 4. **Rich functionality**
Citizens can easily participate at different levels.
- 5. **Secure**
It features a registration system that protects privacy. It can be integrated with existing register and census systems.
- 6. **Adaptive design**
It can be used with all web browsers and mobile devices.
- 7. **Efficient**
Thanks to its powerful administration interface even very small teams can easily manage complex participation processes.
- 8. **On-going support**
From the technical and development teams, as well as insight from other institutions that are using it across the world.

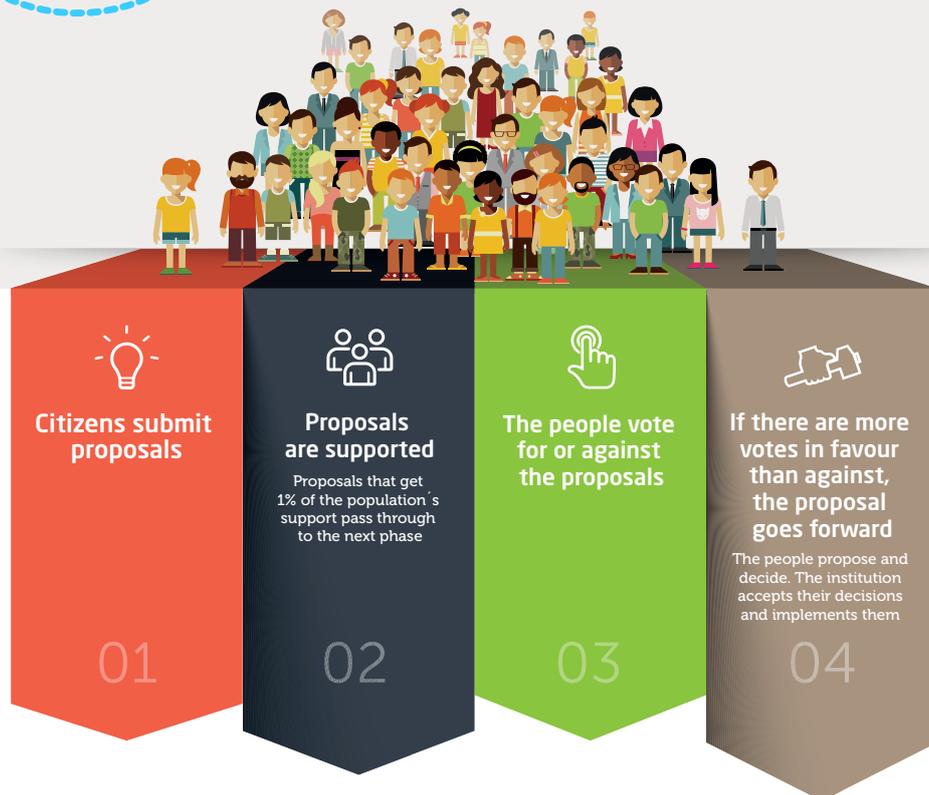
WHAT CAN YOU DO WITH CONSUL?

Consul can easily be adapted to the needs and preferences of each institution. Here are some of the ways of participating that it can facilitate:



Citizen Proposals

Anybody can submit a proposal to improve their city. Others can support it, and if a certain threshold is reached, the proposal can then be put to vote.



These are the steps of the process for Citizen Proposals

- People can present a proposal to improve their city. The platform can be configured to accept who can put forward a proposal: anybody, only those registered, according to age, etc.
- Once the proposal has been submitted, other people can support it. Each institution has access to a moderation module to avoid offensive content, spam, etc.
- When the proposal has reached the number of necessary supporters, it goes to a vote. At this point it can be accepted or rejected by a majority vote from the citizens.

Some important features to keep in mind:

- User verification to avoid duplicate voting.
- The possibility to include support voting with paper ballots.
- An advanced notification system, so that the authors can easily promote their proposals.
- A comments section.



Voting

You can have voting for both citizen's and institution's proposals. Also, you can include the whole region or territory, or just certain areas.

This system allows you to have multiple votings or ratings and to use different voting channels:

- paper ballots
- digital ballot boxes
- postal vote
- web vote

Some important features to keep in mind:

- User verification to avoid duplicate votes.
- The option to restrict participation by area/district/neighbourhood.
- An advanced system to establish and organise voting booths, with presence-based or digital voting systems.



Collaborative Legislation

People can actively participate in preparing legislation and action plans.

The process can be configured and can include the following phases:

- Open debates regarding most important points when the institution begins to study a change in legislation.
- Prioritising what measures to include in the legislation - whether suggested by citizens or the institution itself.
- Publishing the legislation drafts, and giving people the opportunity to comment on specific sections, as well as evaluating the comments of others.

Some important features of this procedure:

- Comments can be associated with a word, a sentence or full sections.
- A colour-graded system according to the number of comments so that they can easily be followed.
- Earlier debates can be fully configured.

Participatory Budgeting

Citizens propose and decide how part of the Administration's Budget is spent. Each person can make a proposal and vote for the initiatives of others.

The proposals that receive the most votes will be implemented.



The phases are as follows:

- 1 The administration determines the Budget amount allocated to what the citizens can decide on.
- 2 A time limit is set for the people to submit their proposals.
- 3 Then it is opened up to citizens to support and prioritise the proposals.
- 4 Following that, the institution reviews the proposals and excludes those that don't fall within their competency, or are not feasible.
- 5 Finally, all validated proposals along with their respective budgets are made public, so citizens can vote for them. Those that receive the most votes are implemented, until the budget is used up.

Some important features to keep in mind:

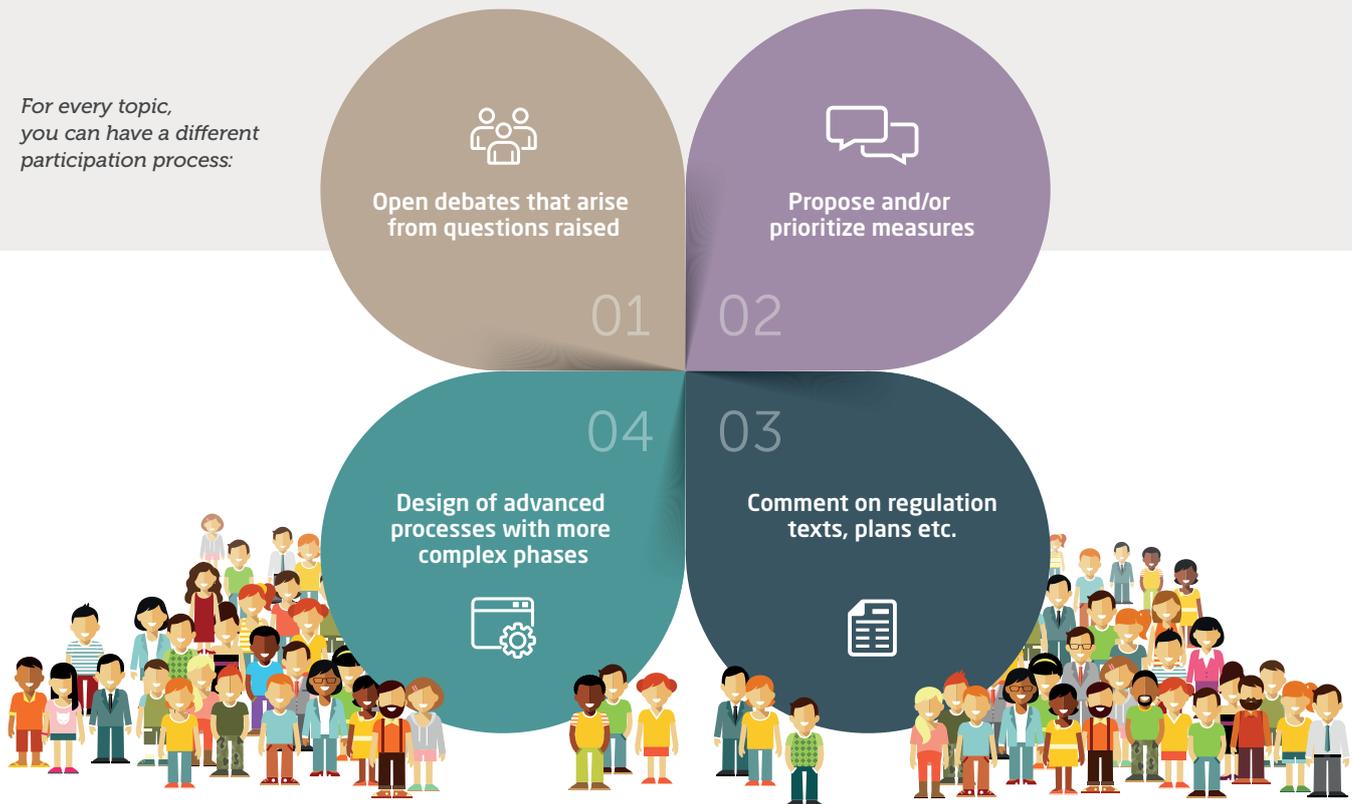
- 1 An advanced interface so you can evaluate the proposals with minimum resources.
- 2 Easily configurable process phases.
- 3 An advanced voting system for multiple proposals.
- 4 Creation of independent budget allocations for areas/districts/ neighbourhoods.

Advanced Processes

Thanks to the flexibility of the tool, more complex participation processes can be designed.

For example, for urban developments or more wide-ranging institutional plans. These could include special phases of participation that would easily be integrated with other processes.

For every topic, you can have a different participation process:



The institution opens up participation for important initiatives that it wishes to carry out:

- *New legislation or regulations*
- *Action plans*
- *New initiatives and important projects*

Debates

Anybody can start a discussion thread and create an independent area where topics can be debated.

Political representatives can also have verified profiles, so they can open topics for debate, as they see fit.



In addition, the platform allows the people to ask questions that will be answered by institutional representatives.

Some important features of this procedure are:

- No limit to the number of comments and debates. Comments are nested to facilitate reading.
- The ability to create categories, labels, geographic locations, trends and intelligent filters, making tracking easier.
- Multiple processes can be run very simply.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO IMPLEMENT CONSUL?

To start working with Consul, you just have to contact us. We will guide you in the right direction both from a technical point of view, and also with regard to sharing the administrative, organizational and legal experience from the network of different institutions that are currently using Consul. That way you can simply replicate the processes, adapting them to your requirements and teams.

From a technical perspective, Consul is open source software published under license from **Affero GPL v3**, which means it is completely free to install, use and modify. No payment is required.

The full code of the platform, along with the enhancements submitted by workgroups that add new functionalities and solutions, is available at <https://github.com/consul/consul>, the GitHub repository of Consul.

Every Administration can easily configure the application to adapt to its needs:

-  Defining the languages to be used (it is 100% multi-lingual).
-  Adapting logos, images and all content.
-  Configuring which participation processes will be activated, and what parameters will define each (phases, deadlines, thresholds).
-  Adjusting the verification system to what institutions need and defining the participation requirements for each process.
-  Creating profiles for institutional representatives with different levels and roles (administrators, moderators, evaluators, managers, etc.).
-  Creating debates, voting systems, processes for legislative collaboration.

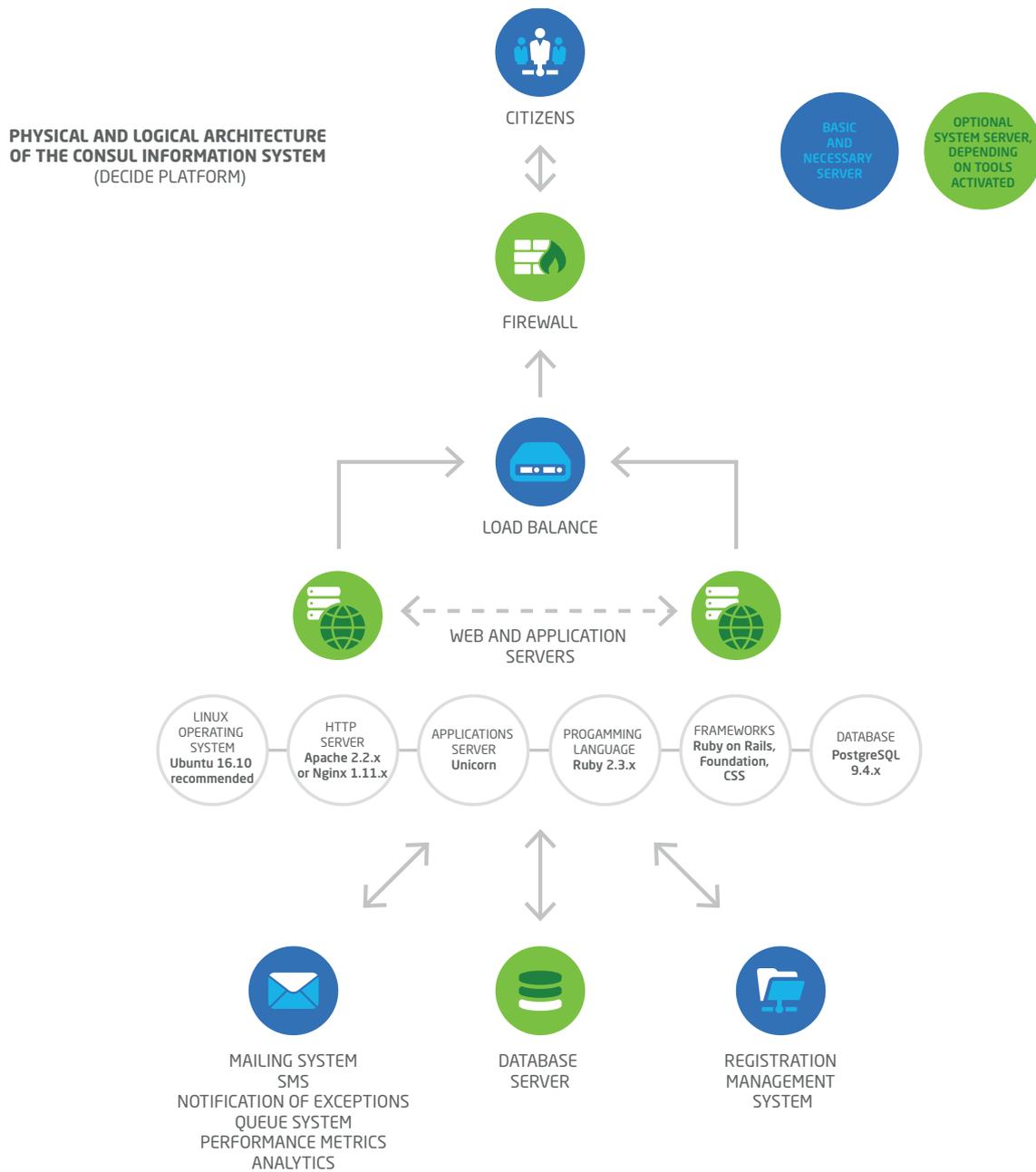
Consul uses the **Ruby** programming language (<https://www.ruby-lang.org/es/>), which is very robust and specifically designed for rapid development and simplifying coding.

It uses Ruby on Rails as a development framework. Data is saved in an open software **PostgreSQL** database, with enterprise-level functionalities and performance. The applications architecture is the classic three layers model, with the ability to scale up on demand.

The platform comprises a frontend for citizens and a backend for the internal management of proposals. It also allows the integration of registers or census systems (to check that the person voting is registered, either via an API or by loading databases into the application). You can send notification SMSs or emails from the system to registered people.

It offers citizens all the information they need about the processes: phases, how to participate, etc. and all the necessary data.

Below is an example of a system put in place to run Consul:



The development team commits to indefinitely keeping the platform code in the **Github** software repository. In some cases (like the Spanish version), it is already available at the Ministry of Industry’s Centre for Technology Transfer, so that it can be freely used by other administrations.

In addition, communication channels have been set up to resolve any doubts that the development

teams might have - not only in the initial implementation phase but also as new features are added.

Once Consul has been installed, the day to day running of the platform doesn’t require any special technical attention, except in the case of specific incidents or simple updates.

INSTITUTIONS THAT TRUST AND USE CONSUL

Since Consul was created, more than 50 national and international institutions have signed up to use the platform as a participation tool.

They are all using Consul, or are in the process of implementing it. Their experience ensures that the platform will continuously grow and improve.

Signing up for Consul is a great opportunity to cost-effectively collaborate with other administrative bodies.

If you are interested in implementing Consul, you can consult www.consulproject.org. There you will find all the information you need to get up and running, and how to avoid any technical, organisational or legal difficulties.

In addition, the development team is happy to accommodate different communication channels to make implementing Consul easier, more agile and effective.

Institutions that are part of the Consul community





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More information at:

www.consulproject.org | <https://github.com/consul/consul>