

Digital Citizens, Smarter Cities: Reinventing Engagement Through Technology

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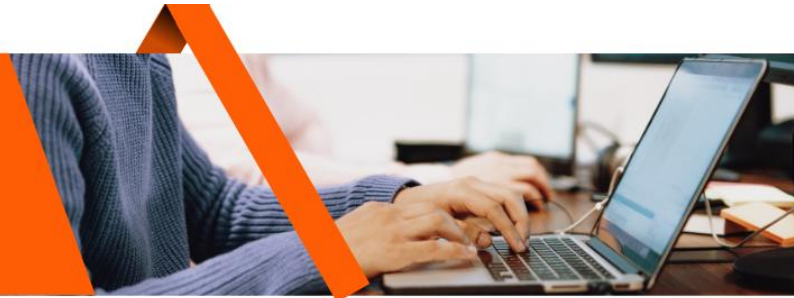
In a world where cities are rapidly evolving, technology is no longer a luxury, it is a necessity. Smart city strategies globally are converging around a shared ambition: to use digital innovation to enhance service delivery, improve governance, and foster inclusive citizen engagement. But this transformation must be rooted in people-first thinking.

At Pulego Technologies, we've spent the past decade developing and deploying digital solutions that place citizens at the centre of urban service transformation. During the Urban 20 (U20) South Africa – Smart City Side Event, we shared key insights from our journey of building platforms that do more than digitise services, they deepen accountability and active citizenry.

From Digital Services to Empowered Citizens

Smart cities are more than connected infrastructure, they are responsive ecosystems where government and citizens interact meaningfully. Through the Co-City Platform, Pulego has delivered scalable solutions across different environments to meet this goal. Below is the highlight of the work we have done:

- 1. Tshwane Safety App** – In partnership with the City of Tshwane and the Innovation Hub, with the support of the Tirelo Bosha, a public service improvement programme facilitated by the Department of Public Service and Administration, this platform enabled citizens to report crimes, by-law infringements, and traffic incidents via mobile, USSD, and web. Over 9,000 incidents were logged during the pilot, replacing spreadsheets with a responsive dashboard for the Metro Police. The project showcased how mobile access, incident tracking, and feedback loops can transform public safety services while building citizen trust and institutional accountability.
- 2. eThekweni Citizens Engagement App** – Piloted with the eThekweni Municipality and Microsoft SA, this smart policing initiative created an intuitive platform for anonymous incident reporting, real-time status updates, and two-way feedback. The app involved Community Policing Forums (CPFs) and ward councillors as active promoters of the tool. It laid the groundwork for using citizen data to inform service improvements, reinforce public safety partnerships, and reframe the Durban Metro Police role from enforcer to enabler.



3. **Call and Dispatch Management (CDM) Module** – Commissioned by CSIR's Defence & Security cluster, the CDM module demonstrated the power of integrated field response systems. Using GPS, IoT trackers, and dashcams, it enabled dispatchers to assign incidents to responders in real-time, track performance, and archive media for reporting. The project proved that smart emergency response can be achieved through modular technology designed with interoperability and scalability in mind.
4. **CGSO Consumer Engagement App** – Built for the Consumer Goods and Services Ombud, this app offers a secure digital channel for consumers to lodge complaints, track progress, and interact via chatbot. Fully integrated with CGSO's CRM system, the solution empowers consumers through transparency and streamlined resolution processes. It also illustrates how smart city principles can apply to regulatory bodies and non-municipal institutions, improving service quality across sectors.

Understanding the Digital Citizen

Our work confirms that digital citizens expect more than convenience, they expect meaningful engagement. They want:

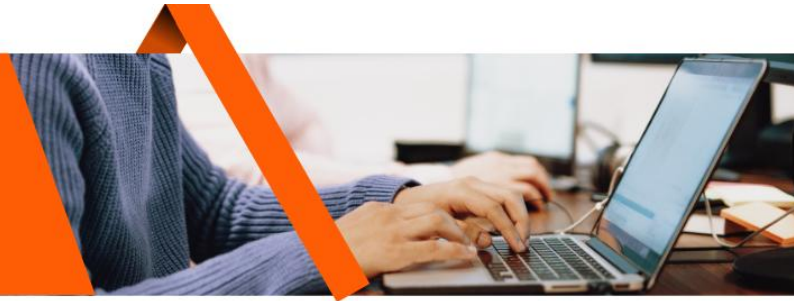
- Accessible multi-channel services across mobile, USSD, and web
- Real-time feedback and transparency in how issues are resolved
- Trust in data privacy and security
- Opportunities to influence decisions through surveys, polls, and forums
- Support in using technology, including training and digital ambassadors

Smart cities must respond not just with platforms but with platforms that listen, adapt, and evolve.

What Makes Engagement Platforms Work?

Success isn't defined by launch day. It's defined by uptake, longevity, and measurable impact. In our experience, citizen engagement platforms succeed when they have:

- A **clear purpose and user-centred design**
- **Internal alignment** across departments and leadership
- Seamless **integration with existing systems**
- Ongoing **change management and training**
- A strong **communication and awareness strategy**
- Built-in mechanisms for **continuous improvement**



- Clear **institutional ownership and budget allocation**

Planning for Sustainability and Scale

Too many great digital tools die in the pilot phase. The approach that should be taken to move towards implementation and sustainability should be focused on:

- **Scalable, modular architectures** that serve more than one use case
- Defined **governance and maintenance frameworks**
- Flexible **business models**: from public funding to SaaS and licensing
- **Local partners** for support, training, and context adaptation
- Strategic alignment with **municipal digital transformation agendas**

We believe every pilot must be a **launchpad**, not a silo.

The Future is Co-Created

As cities strive to become smarter, the greatest success stories will come from those who co-create with their citizens, not just for them. Technology is the enabler. Trust, transparency, and responsiveness are what sustain engagement.

At Pulego Technologies, we remain committed to building bridges between citizens and governments through thoughtful, scalable digital innovation.

If your city or institution is exploring ways to modernise citizen services, we'd be honoured to be part of that journey.