



# Spokane Public Schools

in Washington



thoughtexchange

## Re-visualizing Spokane:

*Thoughtexchange's cohort visualization feature shows the community's priorities and how opinions can change*

**What** makes community engagements *meaningful*? For many district leaders meeting community members face-to-face captures the spirit of meaningful engagement but falls far short when it comes to representing the broader community's wishes. When Spokane Public Schools passed their \$145 million bond with an unprecedented 68.9% majority vote, they credited their partnership with Thoughtexchange for helping them achieve that success.

While the high level of agreement amongst voters would significantly benefit Spokane's children, the true measure of their engagement effort was their ability to listen and learn authentically on a large scale. Taking a look at Spokane's engagement with Thoughtexchange's cohort visualization feature allows "listening and learning" to be seen and understood in a concrete way.

**3,500 participants**

137,000 stars

**7,800 thoughts**

7,800 thoughts

**137,000 stars**

137,000 stars

137,000 stars

3,500 participants

3,500 participants

7,800 thoughts

137,000 stars

## **Community collaboration achieves best outcomes for all**

Spokane used Thoughtexchange's email-based platform to present two bond proposal scenarios to the community and ask for their feedback. Based on past engagements, the District expected upgrades to Albi Stadium and Spokane's high schools to be top priorities. However, when 3,500 participants provided 7,800 thoughts and assigned 137,000 stars to the ideas valued most, a different picture emerged.

"In the past our facilities team would simply make recommendations based on what we felt was best as individuals. Working with Thoughtexchange, we were able to learn what mattered to our community, which resulted in passing a bond with the highest rate we have ever achieved," says Greg Brown, Director of Capital Projects for Spokane Public Schools.

While priorities like not raising the current tax rate and a focus on technology and safety were expected, the shift towards elementary schools that emerged and the lack of support for upgrading Albi Stadium were unexpected outcomes. This insight was essential to focusing Spokane's efforts on areas that were more important to their stakeholders.

*"In the past our facilities team would simply make recommendations based on what we felt was best as individuals. Working with Thoughtexchange, we were able to learn what mattered to our community, which resulted in passing a bond with the highest rate we have ever achieved."*

**GREG BROWN, DIRECTOR OF CAPITAL PROJECTS FOR SPOKANE PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

## **Cohort analysis reveals how more voices impact the conversation**

For Spokane, Thoughtexchange offered critical benefits that could actually demonstrate that meaningful engagement was taking place. For example, the platform allowed the voice of every participant to be heard equally. It also allowed people to change their minds and learn from each other.

This can actually be seen through cohort visualization – which literally creates a picture of what constituents are thinking, then shows how they're influenced by other people's thoughts. In this way, cohort visualization shows the community's willingness to change.

## ***Finding agreement***

Cohort analysis identifies a number of broad groups of people within the community, called cohorts, and represents them with colored circles. The thoughts in the middle, away from all the circles, are ones that appeal to a broad range of people in the community. These thoughts are common interests that everyone can agree on, and for the District, represent items that must be included in the budget. In Spokane's case, the thoughts in the middle center on upgrading elementary schools.

The thoughts represented by the colored circles are most important to people with shared special interests and represent the priority for that particular cohort. For example, we see a common thread in the thoughts in the green cohort: people are concerned about safety, security, and technology.



## ***Opportunities for shifts in thinking***

Cohort visualization can also uncover groups that haven't yet formed an opinion. For example, the pink cohort's thoughts center on making good decisions, but don't identify concrete steps that the District should take. Cohort visualization will reveal if and how this group changes their thinking.

## **Potentially polarizing issues**

Two cohorts in Spokane's community articulated strong opinions that were in direct opposition to each other. The orange cohort's position is very clear: "the budget must include the work on the football stadium." Conversely, the blue cohort believes that "the football stadium should not be a priority."

The size of the colored circles represents the level of support for each cohort's priority at the Share step. At this point, participants have shared their own priorities, but haven't yet seen the thoughts of others. In Spokane's case the circles are roughly the same size, meaning that people are close to evenly split between the issues. The pink circle is slightly larger than the rest, but there are plenty of people in the green cohort concerned about safety, security and technology. And importantly, there are about the same number of people in the orange, pro-football-stadium cohort and the blue, anti-football-stadium cohort.

## **The transformative power of conversation**

The Share step is like a poll. You ask an open-ended question and receive a direct answer from each participant.

The Star step transforms the process into a conversation. Participants get to read each other's answers in an environment where all thoughts are presented equally. They can consider new perspectives they may not have thought of, perspectives that differ from their own, or ones that resonate with their own thinking. And because the process takes place in private, at the participant's convenience, he or she can assign stars to the ones that matter most without consequences for changing positions.

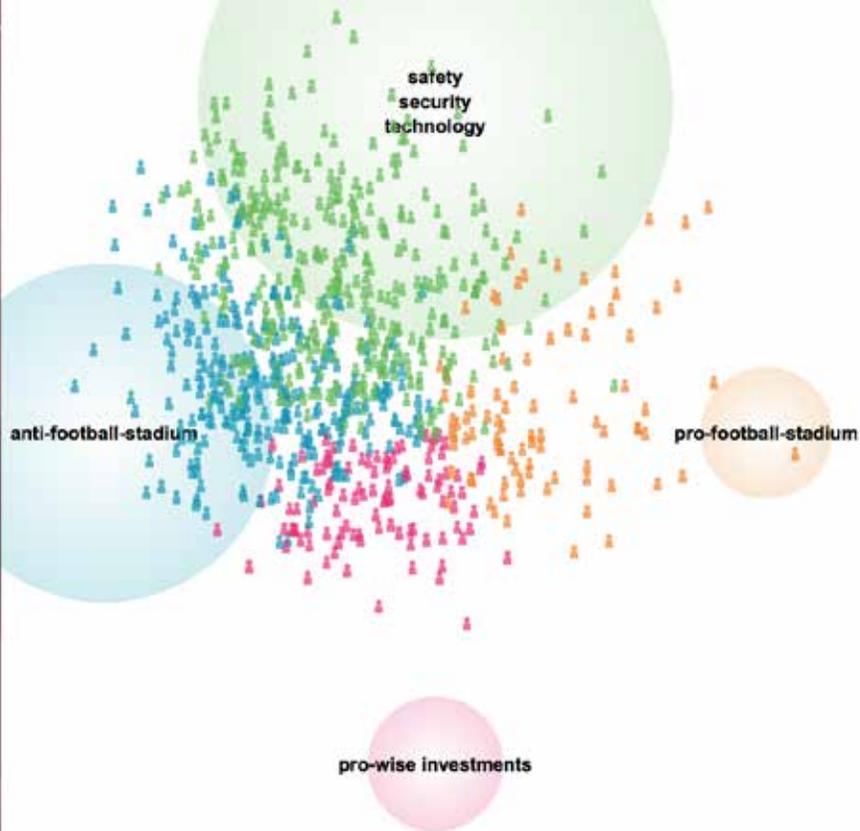
After the Star step, Spokane's cohort visualization shows how those that initially did not have a strong opinion formed one.



**Spokane Public Schools**

*Spokane Public Schools is the largest school district in eastern Washington and the second largest in the state. Our commitment is to keep our students engaged in school, on track for graduation, and prepared for college and career without need for remediation. To do this, we offer several alternative programs, from Montessori and parent participation programs, to gifted classes and programs for at-risk students. Our diverse population includes 29,275 students with 1,314 ELL students speaking 60 different languages.*

[spokaneschools.org](http://spokaneschools.org)



The undecided constituents moved towards the anti-football-stadium cohort. When the broader community considered the renovation of Albi Stadium – reading thoughts that supported it as well as thoughts that did not – a substantial number decided it should not be a priority. What seemed at first to be a 50-50 split turned out to be approximately a 6 to 1 sentiment against the football stadium investment.

The Thoughtexchange Process didn't just reveal broad support

for leaving the renovation of the football stadium out of the budget – it helped forge this support. Spokane's constituents didn't just say what they thought, they were moved by what other people thought. With cohort analysis you can actually see how this happens and the constituents' willingness to accept particular outcomes.