



**PART 1: BASIC DATA**

<b>Title of the experience:</b> Consejos Barriales Virtuales (Virtual Neighborhood Councils)		
<b>Name of the city/region:</b> Rosario		
<b>Country:</b> Argentina		
<b>Institution presenting the candidacy:</b> Municipalidad de Rosario		
<b>Start date of the experience:</b> February 2020		
<b>End date of the experience:</b> ongoing		
<b>Type of candidacy</b>	Innovation on an existing experience	X
<b>Type of experience</b>	Council	X
	Workshop/meeting for diagnosis, monitoring, etc.	X
	E-government/open government	X
<b>Objective of the experience</b>	To achieve higher levels of equality in terms of participation and to incorporate diversity as a criterion for inclusion	X
	Community empowerment	X
	To empower non-organised citizens	X
	To connect different tools of participation within a participatory democracy “ecosystem”	X
	To improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the mechanisms of participatory democracy	X
	To improve the quality of public decision-making through the mechanisms of participatory democracy	X
	To improve the evaluation and accountability of the mechanisms of participatory democracy	X
<b>Territorial area</b>	All the territory	X
<b>Thematic area</b>	Governance	X
	Education	X
	Transport	X
	Urban management	X
	Health	X
	Environment and/or urban agriculture	X
	Culture	X
	Decentralization	X
	Training/learning	X
	Social inclusion	X



## PART 2: DESCRIPTION OF THE EXPERIENCE

### Objectives

**Main objective of the innovative experience:**

***To empower non-organised citizens***

Promote the strengthening of unorganized citizenship in a context of pandemic, achieving greater participation of traditionally non-participatory sectors of the population, making use of new technologies and generating cross-cutting strategies and actions for the coexistence and containment of children and the elderly.

**How have you achieved this objective?**

The main challenge was to transfer the linkage and closeness to virtuality. Awareness strategies were developed through social networks, specially created Whatsapp groups, mails and personalized phone calls, with the aim of making the virtual space of participation of the Neighborhood Councils visible.

The technical teams from each District visited each neighbor's house by house, with the current health protocols, to guide them on how to use the Zoom platform, given that in many cases they were unaware of this tool.

In this way, a greater appropriation of the participatory environment was achieved with the participation of more than 6500 neighbors, fulfilling the main objective of this initiative.

Interdistrict Councils were also held (i.e., open to all the city's neighbors). In these councils, changes in habits were discussed within the framework of the new modality of coexistence in the face of the pandemic and, together with the Secretariat of Public Health, work was done on protection measures for specific sectors that requested them, such as restaurants, hairdressers and beauty salons, stores and companies, consortiums, institutions, as well as for their customers.

**To what extent has this objective been achieved?**

There has been a marked evolution in the number of neighbors of the city who participated in this new experience of neighborhood councils in virtual format. Between February and December 2020, 240 Neighborhood Councils were held. Of that total 204 were through the zoom platform.

Due to the advantages offered by this format: not having to move from one point to another in the city, being able to be connected without neglecting home or personal care issues, and the flexibility in schedules since it takes place after the working day, it aroused the interest of neighbors who, when summoned in person, did not attend, or did so intermittently and did not refer to an institution.

During 2020, more than 6,500 neighbors genuinely joined the call made by each district, as well as the inter-district councils.

It is also noteworthy that many neighbors, after participating for the first time, returned to participate spontaneously in the following Councils, thus generating a greater closeness between citizens and the State.



Dimensions of the experience

**Which is the most innovative aspect of the experience?**

The Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on the role of cities and as a consequence, they have taken on an unprecedented protagonism, assuming the challenge of facing the health, social and economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, while strengthening the social fabric through dialogue and coexistence.

In this sense, the Municipality of Rosario, through the Secretariat of Modernization and Proximity redesigned its public policy related to citizen participation, to continue guaranteeing the link with neighbors even in times of distance and uncertainty and this was achieved by enabling and generating instances of meetings through the use of new technologies adapting the device according to the health situation (social networks, Whatsapp groups specially created, mails and personalized phone calls), thus achieving to add the participation of sectors of the population traditionally not very participative, in virtual environments, an innovative element of this experience, Whatsapp groups specially created, e-mails and personalized phone calls), thus achieving the participation of sectors of the population that traditionally do not participate much in virtual environments, an innovative element of this experience.

When the evolution of the pandemic allowed it, hybrid formats -presential and virtual at the same time- were also carried out.

**To what extent is the procedure transferable?**

This experience is fully replicable in any city, addressing not only health issues but also new needs and ways of participation of citizens, who are no longer necessarily linked to face-to-face instances but wish to get involved from their homes and at times of their choice through virtuality.

In the citizen participation website [participa.rosario.gob.ar](http://participa.rosario.gob.ar) you can find the agenda of the Councils and download a follow-up and evaluation report.

**Why do you consider that the experience is feasible?**

Before starting in virtual format, an analysis was carried out with the technical teams of each District to evaluate the real possibilities of connection in each territory.

While in the West, Southwest and Northwest Districts there were greater difficulties due to lack of wifi, low data availability and/or sharing a single device with the whole family, in other districts such as the Center, South, North and the rest of the Northwest it was observed that they had more tools to connect.

In view of this situation, on numerous occasions the meeting and/or the information worked on during the meeting was transmitted through Rosario Participa's Facebook, understanding the flexibility of the social network.

Within the framework of the subsequent social and mandatory preventive distancing phase, meetings were held with the protocols in force, taking advantage of the facilities of the Municipal District Centers -CMD-, health centers and neighborhood centers to carry out hybrid formats.

In addition, the technical team of proximity participates in neighborhood operations and different interventions in the territory, with the aim of surveying house by house the availability and scope of internet connection (data package/WiFi), and measure the possibilities of participation.


**How has the experience been coordinated with other actors and processes?**

In order to develop this initiative, in addition to summoning citizens not organized or referenced with any institution, it was also articulated with NGOs, merchants, Neighborhood Schools as well as with different departments of the Municipality.

In the year 2021, considering that it is opportune and necessary to achieve a joint work with civil society organizations, a collaboration agreement was signed covering some 90 entities, from the most diverse fields of action, which make up the Advisory Council of Social Organizations of Rosario and whose objective is to work collaboratively in order to develop impact strategies at the social level.

Within this framework, they will be convened to work together through the Neighborhood Councils in the search for solutions to various problems of citizens and to achieve maximum proximity and networking with the neighbors of each neighborhood, strengthen social ties and build horizontal responses to increasingly complex challenges.

**What has been the level of co-responsibility?**

With this experience, numerous actions were achieved together with different actors who participated in each of these instances. Blood and plasma donation days (encouraged by a hypermarket and NGOs in the area); the participative design between neighbors and technicians from the Planning and Public Works Departments of a new space for coexistence that used to be a vacant lot; the remodeling of floors and sandboxes in a square - where the school and the neighboring neighborhood were involved; the remodeling of floors and sandboxes of a square -where the School and the neighboring Neighborhood led the process of collecting money and the Municipality provided the labor and signage; the creation of a historical tour highlighting the figure of Alfonsina Storni and her passage through Rosario together with a group of neighbors from the Echesortu Neighborhood, the club, kindergartens and stores in the area, among others.

For its systematization, a Bank of Experiences was created, a repository of good practices, built collaboratively by neighbors, institutions and technical teams of each district, which is permanently updated. Good Practice: experience of innovation and/or contribution to coexistence and respect for the rules, care for children, improvement of public space and the resolution of problems specific to each place.

**Which evaluation and accountability mechanisms were used?**

A permanent monitoring and evaluation system was designed based on process, impact, results and participant perception indicators, segmented by age, sex and areas of involvement (proposals/claims). During the development of each Council, information gathering instruments (surveys) were applied, as well as records (minutes) of each meeting to systematize the information and make the proposal more dynamic.

A weekly agenda of Neighborhood Councils was drawn up and publicized within the municipal administration and to the outside world.

The information is systematized in a single database of participating neighbors and a participation map is drawn up to detect in which parts of the city there is greater involvement. Bimonthly and annual follow-up reports are also prepared.

In December, a meeting was organized to socialize the experience called "Territories of Learning. Experiences of Citizen Participation in times of Covid", in which more than a hundred neighbors together with the technical teams of the Municipal District Centers (CMD), made visible the projects developed collaboratively in the six districts of the city, promoting learning in the territory from the exchange and valorization of the experience of virtuality in



pandemic, valuing mainly that all the actions that were carried out jointly among the different actors are anchored in the territories, highlighting that all the initiatives arose from collaborative work in virtual environments.

### **Summary of the experience**

In 1995, the city of Rosario began its decentralisation and modernisation process through the Municipal Modernisation and Decentralisation Programme, the main axes consisted in decentralisation (delimitation of the Districts and the implementation of the six Municipal District Centres (CMD)), citizen participation, transparency, quality and efficiency in services and the training of human resources.

Within this framework, the Neighbourhood Councils were organised, which are permanent spaces for meetings between the Municipality, neighbours, institutions and the private sector of our city. They meet according to different geographical or thematic criteria.

With the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic, the Municipality of Rosario, through the Secretariat of Modernisation and Proximity, redesigned its public policy linked to citizen participation to continue guaranteeing links with neighbours even in times of distance and uncertainty, and this was achieved by enabling and generating opportunities for meetings through the use of new technologies, adapting the mechanism according to the health situation, thus achieving the participation of sectors of the population that traditionally do not participate much, an innovative element of this experience.

The virtual format offers advantages such as not having to travel from one part of the city to another, being able to stay connected without having to neglect home or personal care issues, and the flexibility of the timetable as it takes place after the working day. Before starting in virtual format, an analysis was carried out with the outreach teams in each District to assess the real possibilities of connection in each territory.

In the framework of the subsequent social and compulsory preventive distancing phase, meetings were held with the protocols in force, taking advantage of the facilities of the Municipal District Centres (CMD), health centres and neighbourhood centres to carry out hybrid formats.

In addition, a monitoring and evaluation system was developed to record in minutes: the neighbourhood or sector covered by the council, the issues addressed, the main complaints, the age range, the number of participants and their data.

The promotion of effective participatory spaces in the framework of this global health emergency implies actively involving citizens in the debate on issues of public interest as never before, taking advantage of the collective intelligence that has emerged, as expressed in the various manifestations of solidarity and creativity that have arisen.

The Virtual Neighbourhood Councils promote the strengthening of unorganised citizenship in a context of pandemic, achieving greater participation of traditionally non-participatory sectors of the population, making use of new technologies and also this proposal contributes to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially to the achievement of SDG 16, locating the action in the need to promote citizen participation ensuring that decisions are inclusive, participatory and representative and that they respond to the needs of citizens.