Project "Active Citizenship Participation"

Launching Cross-Border Citizen Citizen Participation

Recap & Outlook of the conference on 2 July 2025 in Eupen

Thank you for joining us!

Dear all,

Thank you so much for being part of our kick-off event for cross-border citizen participation in the Euroregion Meuse-Rhine. Or for your interest in it!

On a warm and sunny day, the beautiful setting of Kloster Heidberg provided just the right atmosphere to launch the next phase of our ACP project and reflect on what meaningful citizen participation across borders can and should look like.

This event was not a conclusion – it was a starting point!

What we covered

Together, we...

- Looked back at the ACP pilot phase (2022–2025) and its different engagement formats: online tools, pop-up events, and citizen summits
- Discussed the *Place Standard Tool EMR* and its use as a dialogue-based participation method focused on climate and health
- Reflected on research findings from citizens and stakeholders about participation in the EMR
- Got inspired by the **Common Ground** programme and participation strategies from other European border regions
- Identified success factors and challenges for cross-border participation moving forward

Results

Together, we defined Common Goals for cross-border Citizen Participation:

1) Join euregional Events with Pop-Up Activities to gather citizen input on various topics
2) Create a knowledge exchange platform on cross-border citizen participation in the EMR
3) Host and stimulate more People-to-People projects based on the outcome of the ACP project and other relevant topics

But that is not all. The other results of the workshop session can be seen on the last slides.

Materials & Links

To explore further, here are some helpful and interesting materials and links

• The full **presentation from the event**, including selected photos can be seen below. A LinkedIn post with impressions can be seen here. Feel free to share ☺

• An overview of the ACP project, tools and methods can be found here. This page will also be updated with additional material in the coming weeks (such as training materials on citizen participation). So, make sure to check out this link.

• Reports from the participation events can be found here.

Let's stay connected!

We'd be happy to hear from you – whether you have feedback, questions, or thoughts on how the tools and approaches might support your own work.

Marleen Struß
Marleen.Struss@ggdzl.nl

Photos from the event

Lessons learned from the ACP project and looking ahead

Launching Cross-Border Citizen Participation

Programme

- Review of the ACP project
- The Place Standard tool (a case study)
- The common ground project – shaping regions across borders

//break

- Factors of success – a delliberation
- Possibilities for collaboration
- Setting shared goals

Let's talk

1. Your favourite moment in the project/citizen participation

2. Your last "good conversation" with a stranger

3. Your favourite thing about (living in) the Euregio

"Project Active Citizenship Participation"

An Opportunity for sustainable Citizen Participation in the Euregion Meuse-Rhine
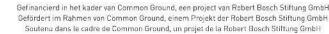
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Project background – Goal

The Active Citizenship Participation (ACP) project aims to establish a sustainable structure for citizen participation within the Euroregion Meuse-Rhine (EMR)

Initially, the project focused on the cross-border theme of climate change and health.

Effects in the EMR: Here & Now

1.2 Project Partners

Supported by Nexus and evaluated by Com.X

1.3 Project implementation

- Project duration: **September 2022 – August 2025**

- German StadtRaumMonitor was adapted into Euregional version: The Place Standard Tool Euregio Meuse Rhine (PST EMR)

- Train the trainer session on the application of the PST was held

- **Ensuring political visibility**
  - Dialogues, presentations and recommendations to policymakers, politicians & stakeholders

- **Citizen Participation events**

- **Online tool**

Place Standard Tool Euregio Meuse-Rhine (PST EMR)

What is it?

- The Place Standard Tool helps citizens discuss their living environment based on five key themes:
  - Mobility
  - Public Space
  - Supplies / Housing / Education & Economy
  - Social Interaction
  - Climate Adaptation

- Citizens give a score from 1 to 7, but strength lies in qualitative discussion

What is new in the ACP project?

- Made the tool euregional
  - Questions about neighboring countries
  - Translations to German, Dutch, French, English

- Added climate-focused questions

- Adapted it for multiple uses

ACP – Engagement throughout the EMR

Citizen summits: Format overview

Why this format?

- In depth perspectives on climate change & health through group discussions

How did it work?

- Moderated group (8 – 15 participants)
- PST EMR as guide
- Exclusive focus: Climate change and health

Where?

- Düren and Kerkrade (Fall 2024)
- Online summit (December 2024)
- Group discussion AIGS Belgium (February 2025)
- Citizen Summit in Heinsberg in Spring 2025

Who?

- Euregional Citizens (age 17 – 80+)
- 46 participants

Citizen summits: Recruitment & insights

How were participants recruited?

- Special interest groups (e.g. seniors)
- Project & stakeholder mailing lists
- Social media (LinkedIn, Facebook)
- GGD ZL Burgerpanel
- Friends & colleagues
- €20 voucher incentive

Key insights

- Open format: low reach
- Targeting special interest groups more efficient
- But Quality > quantity: Rich exchange
- Topic (climate & health) low pull

Pop-Up engagement – Format overview

Why this format?

- Casual, low-threshold setting
- Engage with broad audience (e.g. age, gender, education)

How did it work?

- Quick intuitive feedback on self-chosen topics out of the PST EMR
- Large Spiderweb poster as visual guide
- Topics were rated using Post-Its
- Short conversations with individuals & small groups

Where?

- Three-Country-Party in Landgraaf
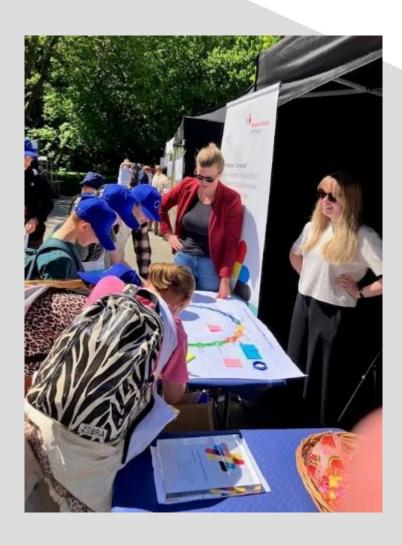- EU-Day in Vaals

Pop-Up engagement: Insights

Who?
- Euregional Citizens of all ages
- Approx. 200 participants

How were participants recruited?
- Inviting tent setup
- Small giveaways: Candy, Pens, Key Chains
- Colorful spiderweb poster & Post Its drew people in

Key insights
- Easy to attract, but limited depth of discussion
- Participants chose personally relevant topics
  - 🚌 Public transport
  - 🏥 Healthcare
  - 🛍️ Shopping
  - 🌳 Green spaces

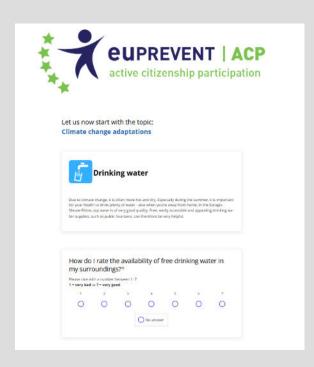# Online participation: Format overview

Why this format?

- Reach a broader EMR audience
- Allow individual, flexible participation.

How?

- Digital version of the PST EMR
- Available in Dutch, French, German and English
- Climate module mandatory, others optional
- Participants gave:
  - Ratings per theme
  - Qualitative feedback

Who?

- About 1.300 EMR citizens

Online participation: Insights

How were participants recruited?

- Online campaign on LinkedIn and Facebook
- GGD ZL Burgerpanel
- Personal contacts
- Press releases

Key insights

- Many participants from GGD ZL Burgerpanel
- Online campaign ensured geographical & age diversity
- Low drop-out rates
- Most participants completed entire PST EMR, not just climate module
- Online tool as supportive measure

How do I assess the availability of free drinking water in my neighbourhood?

- 1 = very bad
- 2 = bad
- 3 = rather bad
- 4 = neutral
- 5 = rather good
- 6 = good
- 7 = very good

Germany: 3,0   Belgium: 4,0   Netherlands: 5,0

Results - Positive Momentum

What works well related to climate change and health in the EMR

• Green spaces and tree planting are seen as effective and desirable

• Citizens are motivated to engage – especially when results are visible

• Public awareness is growing:
  • More people recognize links between
    climate change & health
  • Topics like heat stress, clean air, and water access are increasingly
    understood

Results – Climate & Health Challenges in the EMR

Key Concerns Identified by Citizens:

- Lack of free public drinking water & cooling spaces

- Limited access to information during heatwaves and floods.

- Participation formats (e.g., long surveys) often exclude certain groups

Citizens ask for Cross-Border Preparedness
- Joint early warning system for floods, heat, and storms
- One coordinated, visible system across BE–DE–NL
- Shared emergency response strategy & joint infrastructure
- Inclusive, low-threshold participation methods

Exploring Citizen and Stakeholder Perceptions of the Adapted Place Standard Tool for Climate Change and Health in the Euroregion Meuse-Rhine: A qualitative study

Andreea Sima

Climate Change, Health & Citizen Voice: What's at Stake?

- Climate change affects health and knows no borders
- Top-down policies alone fail to solve "wicked" problems
- Citizens must be meaningfully included — especially in cross-border regions
- Euroregion Meuse-Rhine — 3.9M citizens
- Floods, COVID-19 → need for collaboration
- PST EMR= adapted tool with 14 themes + climate/health lens

Research Questions:

- How do citizens and stakeholders perceive the Adapted Place Standard Tool in fostering cross-border participation on climate change and health issues in the Euroregion Meuse-Rhine?

- What are the key barriers and enablers to citizen participation in climate change and health through the Adapted PST?
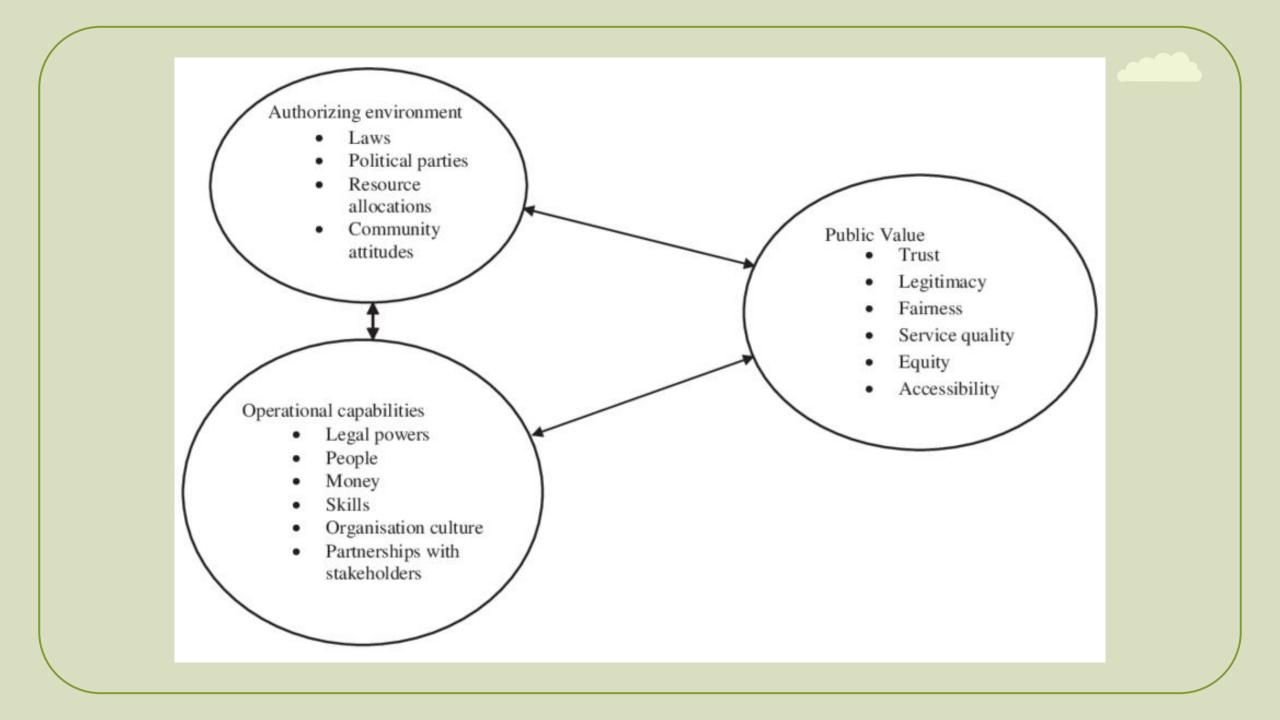
Aim:

- To evaluate how the Adapted PST supports cross-border citizen engagement and identify barriers/enablers to participation.

Research Design & Methodology

- **Approach:** Qualitative research

- **Methodology:** Semi-structured interviews with 12 participants: citizens and experts

- **Theoretical Framework:** Public Value Theory (Strategic Triangle)

  - Authorizing Environment

  - Operational Capabilities

  - Public Value

Authorizing environment
- Laws
- Political parties
- Resource allocations
- Community attitudes

Public Value
- Trust
- Legitimacy
- Fairness
- Service quality
- Equity
- Accessibility

Operational capabilities
- Legal powers
- People
- Money
- Skills
- Organisation culture
- Partnerships with stakeholders

Participants & Demographics

- 7 students, 5 professionals

- 66% from Netherlands

- Underrepresented: Belgium

Overview of Themes

Laws & Community Attitudes

aPST as Conversation Starter

Accessibility & Equity

From Tokenism to Meaningful Participation

Visions for the PST EMR

Results

Theme 1: The Role of Policies, Laws and Community Attitudes in Citizen Participation in Climate Change

"The laws of the national systems don't allow more cooperation"

- Conflicting national laws block participation
- Community attitudes shaped by politics, history
- Younger & urban groups more active

Results

Theme 1: The Role of Policies, Laws and Community Attitudes in Citizen Participation in Climate Change

" I think the system in the Netherlands is based on diplomas. So, if you have a high diploma your input is maybe seen as more valid compared to someone who's not an expert…So, I think the system hinders participation." (expert)

"I don't think we're being hindered…we had a lot of actions that were supported but most of these come from the citizens themselves and they are supported. There is a lot that is possible." (citizen)

Results

Theme 2: The PST EMR as a Conversation Starter, Not Just a Survey

- Encourages meaningful conversations, not passive answers.
- Enhances perspective-sharing in group settings.
- Mixed feelings about how data is used after submission.

"I think it is useful as a conversation starter or as a guide to have a discussion with others, more than it is a survey." (expert)

Results

Theme 3: Accessibility and equity of the PST EMR

Hard-to-Engage Target Groups

- Low SES → "If you are poor, sustainability is not high on your agenda… they care about survival."
- Low Literacy People
- Elderly
- Migrants
- Young Couples with Kids
- ADHD
- People with dyslexia → "People with dyslexia might struggle just because of the layout right now."

Results

Theme 4: From Tokenism to Meaningful Participation

- Participation is often shallow, symbolic.
- Feedback loops are crucial to citizen participation
- Trust in institutions is low, especially among marginalized groups.

"Citizen Participation now is more like a check in the box" (expert)

"Citizen participation in my opinion is more than just giving input. It is also more bidirectional" (expert)

Results

Theme 5: Visions for a PST in Citizen Participation

1. *"Make it Fun, Make it Simple, Make it Personal"*
2. *"Show Them Why Their Voice Matters"*
3. *Bringing people together*
4. *"Start Young!"*

Results

Barriers	Enablers
Fragmented governance	Motivated and Active Citizens
Limited operational resources	Committed Local Authorities
Language barriers	Structure and Accessibility of the PST
Time, Length & Vagueness of the tool	Explanations, Open-ended Qs
Complex to use	Easy to use

Recommendations for Future Research & Policy

- Focus future research on marginalized voices (low SES, migrants, neurodivergent individuals).

- Assess the real-world application of the PST EMR in diverse contexts.

- Advocate for harmonized cross-border laws supporting participation.

- Create feedback mechanisms that loop input back to participants

- Show people why their voice matters

- Promote co-design approaches that involve citizens early in tool development.

Conclusion

- The Adapted Place Standard Tool raises awareness among citizens

- The tool is beneficial in providing encouragement to participate

- It may struggle to fully engage citizens in participating due to differences in administrative systems, cultural norms, settings and history and accessibility problems.

- While the PST, can represent the start of something it might not create sustained impact without showing people why their voice matters.

Questions?

Thank you for your attention

Common Ground

Shaping Regions Across Borders

Launching Cross-Border Citizen Participation, 02/07/2025 in Eupen

Short Introduction:
Why Common Ground?
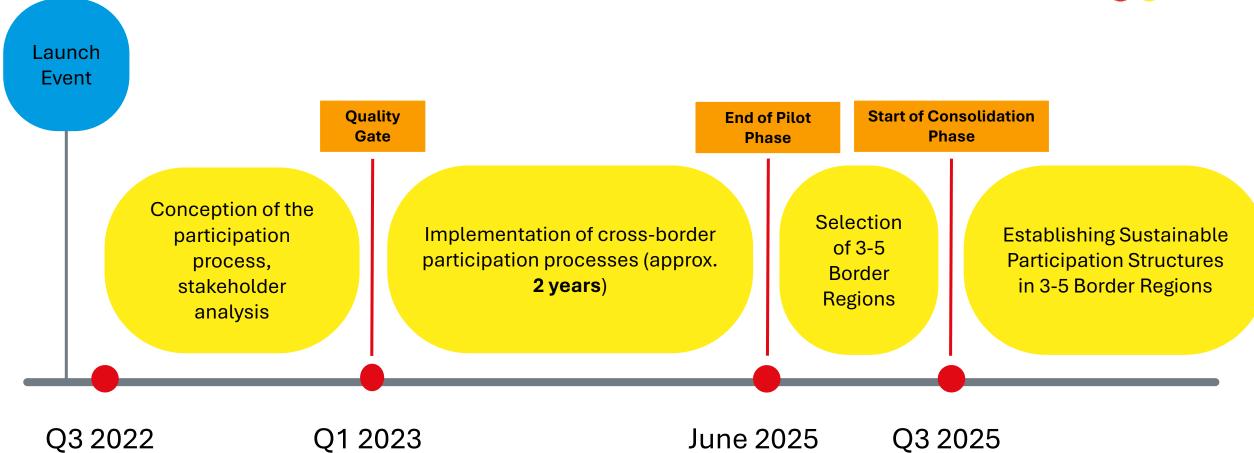
Common Ground –
Shaping Regions Across Borders

Scope of the funding

- Guidance and advice according to individual requirements

- Financial funding - up to 1.6 Mio. € in total for the eight border regions

- Qualifications through advanced training courses

- Networking and peer learning events

Common Ground: Programme Timeline

Launch Event

Quality Gate

End of Pilot Phase

Start of Consolidation Phase

Conception of the participation process, stakeholder analysis

Implementation of cross-border participation processes (approx. **2 years**)

Selection of 3-5 Border Regions

Establishing Sustainable Participation Structures in 3-5 Border Regions

Q3 2022

Q1 2023

June 2025

Q3 2025

Cross border participation: Exmples and Learnings

Climate friendly city centre, Frankfurt/Oder-Słubice (PL/DE)

Goal: Including citizens views in the planning for a climate-friendly, integrated cross-border city center by 2035

Formats

- Establishment of two civic tables ("talking benches")
- Citizen picnics (incl. excursions, exchanges, idea collection)
- Online surveys & thematic workshops

Key learnings: New citizen groups attracted for participation; project structure with many partners was too complex

Institutionalization: binational council for joint cross-border city planning, continuation in other projects (e.g. Interreg) ensured

Stronger together, Neiße-Bober (PL/DE)

Euroregion Spree-

(Original) Goal: Improve cross-border risk & crisis communication

Formats

- Citizen dialogues

- Accompanying Citizen advisory council

Key learnings

- Try new formats & include fun activities to attract citizens

- Shared work between occasional (dialogues) and steady participant (advisory council) works well

- Professional facilitation needed

Institutionalization: Citizen advisory council will continue its work

Trialogue in the border triangle   (PL/CZ/DE)

Goal: Understanding different citizens perspectives/demands in order to design a just transformation process in the former mining region

Formats

- survey countries identifying interests of citizens
- Citizen participation workshops (measures and recommendations for common development plan of the "small triangle"

Key learnings: application of different methods improved mobilization/ recruitment of citizens

Institutionalization: a citizens' advisory board to accompany the transformation process in the next years will be established

Spatial concept High Rhine (CH/DE)

Goal: Including citizens' perspective in the development of a cross-border spatial concept

Citizen participation formats

- Events for activating citizens: walking and bike tours

- Cross-border citizen panel

Key learnings

- Recruitment is very expensive

- communication plays an important role

- due to the size of the area, it is hardly possible to develop a sense of unity among the population in the border region

Institutionalization: Charta for implementation of citizens recommendations signed by municipalities; to be discussed

Democracy in action, Emmendingen - PETR Sélestat Alsace (FR/DE)

Goal: Recommendations for the sustainable use of an island in the Rhine river

Citizen participation formats

- activating citizens: Climate brunch, bike tours, neighboring walks etc.

- Online survey / online participation platform

- Workshops (project ideas on energy, mobility, food, biodiversity)

Key learnings

- Activation of citizens and stakeholders is very time consuming

- Practical activities engage citizens who don´t attend trad. formats

Institutionalization: Partnerships of mayors on both side of the border in order to pursue the work on the islands with the engagement of citizens (including activating events to mobilize citizens)

Borderless energy region Ralingen-Rosport/Mompach (LUX/DE)

Goal: Recommendations for moving closer to climate neutrality in the border region

Formats

- Events for activating citizens: excursion to solar panel field etc.

- Future workshops (developing scenarios)

Key learnings

- Recruitment beyond the usual suspects is challenging where "everybody knows everybody"

- Some topics are hard to work on because of existing laws

Institutionalization: To be discussed, possibly a cross-border working group of citizens & politicians

Agglomeration Concept, SaarMoselle (FR/DE)   Euroregion

Goal: Recommendations for a common spatial development of the border area

Formats

- Activating survey (strategic development of the Eurodistrict)

- Constitution of a cross-border citizen committee

Key learnings

- Activating survey are time and resource consuming

- Managing a cross-border committee is challenging

- Institutionalization of committee requires close collaboration with decisionmakers at different levels & depend political timing/ agenda

Institutionalization

- Institutionalization of citizen committee & transfer of participation process to the Eurodistrict SaarMoselle

Thank you!

Importance of citizen participation

Key principles underlying public participation include **inclusivity**, **transparency**, **accountability**, and **respect for diverse opinions**.

Civic engagement **helps foster a sense of ownership, empowerment, and social cohesion**, ultimately **leading to more effective and legitimate decision-making processes**.
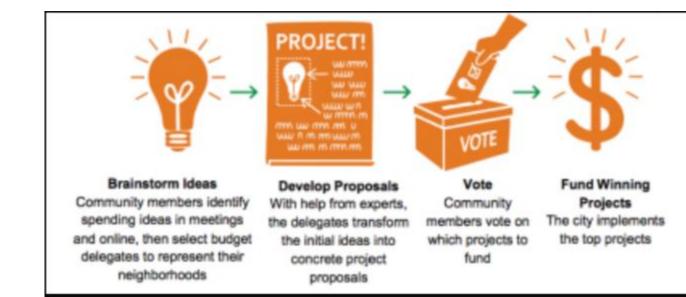
Open Government (OG)

- Open Government (OG) as a concept for modernising the public sector is becoming increasingly prominent in recent debates in administrative science.

- A model of government and administrative action which, guided by the three premises of **transparency, participation and collaboration**, shapes the development and implementation of public policies in close interaction with actors from civil society, business and science

"If politicians want us to trust them, they should also trust our judgement"

Electoral Reform Society

Types of citizen participation

- Citizen Assemblies
- Citizen Summits
- Citizen Juries
- Citizen budget
- (P)referenda

Brainstorm Ideas
Community members identify spending ideas in meetings and online, then select budget delegates to represent their neighborhoods

Develop Proposals
With help from experts, the delegates transform the initial ideas into concrete project proposals

Vote
Community members vote on which projects to fund

Fund Winning Projects
The city implements the top projects

What is important for successful cross-border citizen participation in the EMR?

3 Essential factors for success

3 Challenges

- 1 notetaker
- 1 presenter
- 1 timekeeper
- 1 coordinator

Results

Handwritten two-column chart:

Success factors
- Intrinsic motivation required
- Common / shared goals
- Trust
- Easy access
- The right (attractive) topic

Political willingness
Community binding

Challenges
- Language
- Bureaucracy
- Legislation
- Inclusivity
- Long-term engagement

Expectation mgmt
Communication

Change post behaviour
Institutional alignment
Finances + people

Collaboration

- What experience do we have with (cross-border) citizen participation?

- Where is the biggest added value for me/my organisation?

- What can I/we bring to the table?

Open dialogue, write down added values and deliverables
(10 minutes)

Results

Common goals

- What are realistic goals in cross-border citizen participation within the next 2 years?

- Work out 3 concise goals (1 sentence) with your group

Results

Let's vote

Thank you for joining