CSIUCR
CENTER FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION

Toolkit for Housing & Community Engagement

INNOVATING FOR 2021 & BEYOND

Executive Summary

In response to conversations around the most recent housing update, this toolkit is the result of discussions around community engagement, governmental policies, and how both can help address longstanding inequities. It builds on the existing expertise of planners, community advocates, and planning agencies, providing concrete examples of innovative methods that can deepen public engagement and tap into the planning profession's desire for greater equity and sustainability.

At its core, community engagement is an integral part of the planning process, helping planners improve bi-directional communication, increase satisfaction, and strengthen public trust in government agencies. It also plays a key role in uplifting the voices of community members, helping to provide an opportunity for even the most marginalized to provide their input and lived expertise. This is particularly important as community members are the most directly impacted by the choices made, but may not have traditional subject-specific technical expertise nor feel that they have enough power to play a significant role in the process. Within this context, this toolkit aims to support several goals of community engagement, namely (1) increasing awareness/transparency, trust, and satisfaction, (2) eliminating inequities (including structural), and (3) meeting requirements & finding solutions.

Many agencies are well-versed in holding and running community forums and meetings, widening the reach of public information and expanding the ability of communities to give input regarding new developments and modifications to existing policies. And while there are many instances of planning departments moving beyond standard meetings, resources such as online tools can further the reach of critical information and provide greater flexibility for engagement. This toolkit aims to provide resources and ideas for municipalities, but also to provide community-based organizations with background information so they can better integrate their advocacy work.

The recommendations come from a community-asset-based lens, recognize the resource constraints that many agencies face (such as in personnel, technology, finances, and time), and suggest ways to utilize resources most effectively and efficiently. In addition, these can be used to jump-start brainstorming for the type of specific innovation needed for each individual place and circumstance. Some key recommendations include:

Be aware of the assets a community already has and can bring to any planning process. Lived experiences are important, and counts as expertise.

Trusted messengers are one way to start making inroads with hard-to-engage populations. They can take many forms (e.g., community organizations, nonprofits, community health workers/promotoras), and can also serve as a liaison to help build capacity within communities.

Not all innovation needs to be splashy. In many instances, small tweaks such as increasing the amount of time allowed to provide public comment/input serve as comparatively low-resource-intensive modifications that can lead to increased participation.

Be creative and open to different ways standard outreach can be run. Exercises such as role-playing can provide an opportunity for people to think differently about issues as well as open up the floor for formal and informal conversations.

Providing options to build up infrastructure with communities (e.g., equipping communities with data and other related tools, providing leadership training and mentoring) can help create a solid foundation for long-term engagement.

Remember to say thank you! Showing gratitude is important, and can help create a positive experience, particularly for those who are new to the process.

Also included is a framework to evaluate engagement processes as well as outcomes, helping communities and agencies establish lines of communication in order to move closer in their mutual quest to advance equity, sustainability, shared prosperity, and high quality of life.

Notably, this toolkit also directly acknowledges that it is the product of one moment in the ongoing evolution of what community engagement is and can aspire to be. With this in mind, this is meant to be a living document, and as such will need to be revisited as resources and context change, and approaches are further refined.

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Motivation

The motivation behind community engagement can be conceptualized as three broad categories: (1) increasing awareness/transparency, trust, and satisfaction, (2) eliminating inequities (including structural), and (3) meeting requirements & finding solutions. And on an even more general scale, it is to promote communication in order to increase overall satisfaction and build trust. Planners want to create good plans and build consensus for these plans.

Breaking things down further, engagement can encompass things such as:

- Promoting the amount and quality of communication
- Help address conflict & put it within context
- Promoting overall community satisfaction with and build/increase trust in both specific projects as well as government as a whole
- Promoting partnership between local governments and community
- Increasing public awareness, and increasing agency awareness of public views
- Increasing transparency of the process
- Increasing fairness and power sharing
- Help find solutions, reach consensus, improve the quality of decisions made
- Help facilitate the implementation of a solution
- Increase trust
- Increase satisfaction

While planners are aware of the rich lived experience and expertise within communities, and want to engage this knowledge base, it can sometimes be difficult to figure out where to start, or how to dig deeper to move beyond process requirements. It can also be difficult to find the staff time, or staff with appropriate expertise and experience to facilitate the type of engagement needed to foster meaningful and lasting participation. It can also be difficult to reconcile the differences between what the 'ideal' is, versus what the 'reality' may be on the ground.

With all of the above in mind, however, the professional skills, experience, and expertise that planners bring are valuable and have the potential to create the lasting relationships with communities that are key to fostering meaningful long-term engagement and improved outcomes.

State of the Field

A brief review of the documentation available online regarding the most recent efforts at housing element updates found that the majority of municipalities utilized some combination of public meetings, websites/mailing lists, and online/social media. Some held smaller meetings, focus groups, and workshops, and a few indicated that they engaged specific organizations and/or stakeholder groups. Several indicated that they provided documents in more than one language, with a few providing translation services for meetings.

Power Issues

Power imbalance has been and continues to be a pressing issue, and a barrier to both getting community members involved as well as providing a space that is conducive to free expression. Ideally, engagement is a key vehicle to have important conversations about various issues, as well as an opportunity for policy makers to hear directly from constituents, particularly those that are most affected. While planners have worked to address power issues, the planning process itself has historically been a source of power imbalance, and this has permeated into the present. Because of this, the following sub-sections are intended to highlight some approaches the field is currently utilizing to address power issues.

Rethinking one-size-fits-all public engagement
The planner-citizen relationship has evolved over time, both in theory and practice. While planners are still involved with the technical aspects of policy making and implementation, their role has shifted to incorporate more community-level expertise, largely due to the recognition that while planning has sought to address a variety of issues, communities of color and marginalized communities have more often than not been harmed in the process. Partially as advocacy, partially as participatory, the field has been working to understand what types of engagement are most effective when, and how to best ensure inclusivity. Much of this has zeroed in on the planner being an active listener first, with technical expertise as a supporting asset. Two major questions are: (1) what are you trying to find out, and (2) is the method you are using the best one? This approach - active listening and co-learning - works toward the idea of being a facilitator as opposed to coming in as (an outside) technical expert. Additionally it hones in on the push-and-pull between process (what have we done and how did we get here?) and impact (did our methods produce results?). Because at the end of the day, did the initiative improve the lives of the people that live and work in these areas?

Web-based platform for Citizen Participation
The planning field is increasingly taking advantage of online tools, and in 2019, the American Planning Association honored Lakewood, Colorado, for their innovation in planning practice. Lakewood set up a website, https://lakewoodspeaks.org, that provides links to planning documents, but importantly allowed participation in hearings two weeks before the actual meeting. This particular innovation has allowed individuals to digest and interact with the material at their own pace, without the constraints of having to attend an in-person meeting at a specific time and place, significantly increasing participation. However, as noted in the next section, access to technology is a pressing and persistent issue. Any type of digital outreach needs to be complemented with low- and no-technology options.

Supporting and increasing participation of marginalized and underrepresented groups
Many local nonprofits are able to engage in outreach partnerships. Organizations such as the Institute for Local Government (ILG) provide public engagement resources, including evaluation measurement tools. For example, some of ILG's key recommendations for engaging immigrant groups include: making immigrant-oriented media an integral component of any communication and outreach strategy; make public meetings and their locations accessible to immigrant communities (e.g., hold them in immigrant neighborhoods, choose locations that are easily accessible by public transportation, provide childcare, consider what times account for various community obligations, make culturally appropriate arrangements), providing training and leadership options for immigrant groups. The bottom line is for planners to listen, to treat immigrants as experts, to provide them the tools needed (e.g., language assistance, leadership training), to go to immigrant-friendly spaces (as opposed to only holding meetings in city/county facilities), and to make a long-term commitment which involves follow-through..

Opportunity to Innovate

Due to widespread availability of technology, there are many ways to innovate that are cost- and resource-effective. As indicated in the State of the Field section, many municipalities are already taking advantage of online tools to reach broader audiences.

In many ways, planning's large geographic reach - and all of the variation that comes with it - provides barriers to full engagement, but also key opportunities. For instance, methods that can be useful to engage hard-to-reach populations can also be used in other capacities. Additionally, an understanding of what methods are not successful in certain areas (e.g., very rural) helps push the boundaries of what is typically considered "community engagement", leading to innovation. One thing to note is that 'innovation' doesn't necessarily mean that something has to be completely brand-new - it often can mean that something is tried in a new situation/circumstance. For instance, a planner shared that they were in charge of a very large rural area. Participation was historically low, and when they conceptualized trying to get survey data to gather resident input and understand their needs, reach was a huge factor. While electronic surveys were made available via a website and social media, the team eventually opted to additionally print out paper surveys and leave them at "public" places. In this particular instance - and this is where the 'innovation' occurred - this included public libraries but also post offices (which often are meeting places in rural areas) and local/mini-marts, and an identified contact was left with a self-addressed stamped envelope to mail completed surveys back.

Another example comes from Japan, where one model of engagement utilizes role-playing as a way to help citizens think differently about issues. Utilizing the framework of advocating for an 'imaginary future generation', the exercises take a twist on the typical 'from another point of view' approach and instead employ time as the variable. The underlying rationale is that those born in the future have no ability to influence current affairs, and most individuals are typically (consciously or unconsciously) biased to the present (see Kamijo et al., 2017; Hara et al, 2019). In this example, individuals are tasked with negotiating on behalf of future generations, and study results on this methodology revealed that over half of the time participants went in the direction of sustainability.

Granted these specific approaches may not be successful in all scenarios, the idea is more to think about small to medium tweaks to existing efforts that could bring new voices into the mix. The planner in the first example mentioned that a key part of the approach was talking with local residents, and getting their input and suggestions on places to find people. Who else better to identify where people are than the residents themselves? Additionally, part of the entire process is to make community members feel compelled and empowered to participate. Meeting community members within their own community spaces, on terms that work with their particular circumstances, creates a sense of empowerment and that their voices count and matter. On the planners' end this means making a concerted, long-term effort to lay the foundation for such engagement. Additionally, establishing and maintaining this foundation can help address time concerns, especially when trying to meet all of the mandated timelines for community outreach amongst other competing deadlines. In the second example, the researchers who studied the approach in the Japanese role-playing scenario found that having to put themselves into the shoes of residents a generation into the future pushed participants to think beyond their own immediate, present needs. In many ways this is one example of a relatively low-investment tweak to what could be a typical meeting setup, which provides a framework to help individuals consider different types of cost-benefit analyses than they might otherwise. It could also help empower individuals to think creatively about how to address conflicting views and help link present decisions to its future impacts.

Historically Marginalized Populations

While access to affordable and stable housing is essential for all people, specific programs, initiatives, and strategies are necessary to support populations that have been historically marginalized and have faced additional and sometimes extreme barriers. Populations like the formerly incarcerated and chronically homeless face their own set of unique challenges and barriers, which must be met with innovative solutions.

While there are a wide array of housing barriers that historically marginalized populations face, they can be broadly categorized into two buckets: (1) social determinants of housing (social inequities) and (2) pipelines and structural systems.

Social Determinants of Housing (Social Inequities)

The concept of social determinants of health has been used to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the many factors that can impact an individual's health. In addition to resources such as education, safety, and healthy food, access to stable, affordable, and safe housing is a key factor. In fact, housing insecurity - the lack of stable, secure, and safe housing - has been found to negatively impact an individual's health and well-being. Because housing and health are so interrelated, many of the same social factors that can affect an individual's health also can affect their housing status.

As noted by the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (2020), some social determinants of health that also are applicable in terms of housing insecurity include:

- Access to educational, economic, and job opportunities
- Access to health care services (physical and mental health care)
- Availability of community-based resources
- Social support
- Social norms and attitudes (e.g., discrimination, racism, and distrust of government)
- Exposure to crime, violence, and social disorder (e.g., presence of trash and lack of cooperation in a community)
- Socioeconomic conditions (e.g., concentrated poverty and the stressful conditions that accompany it)
- Language/Literacy
- Access to mass media and emerging technologies (e.g., cell phones, the Internet, and social media)
- Culture
- Immigration status

(For the full comprehensive list of social determinants of health please visit: https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-of-health) For example, some populations that may be particularly affected by these social inequities include individuals that need mental and substance abuse support, physically and developmentally disabled individuals, and those with undocumented status. This is by no means a comprehensive list of historically marginalized populations, and it is important to note that many diverse populations and groups face social inequities, not only in housing, but in many other areas as well.

Pipelines and Structural Systems

The social inequities and determinants mentioned above are often driven and reinforced by both official and unofficial pipelines and structural systems. This is particularly true for formerly incarcerated individuals, who face many barriers to accessing stable and affordable housing. The stigma of incarceration often results in people living in places like hotels or motels, just one step from homelessness itself. In fact, recent studies have found that formerly incarcerated people are almost 10 times more likely to be homeless than the general public (Couloute, 2018; Urban Institute, 2020). Additionally, rates of homelessness are especially high among specific demographics. For example, incarcerated youth that have experienced the school to prison pipeline, often face housing instability when they are released.

Important Considerations: It is important to recognize that historically marginalized populations are not only hard to engage, but importantly have a long history of being exploited and disproportionately burdened. Thus, any engagement effort needs to be specifically tailored to the specific population in question. The following are some general guidelines and best practices to help build the foundations of an inclusive and equitable engagement plan.

Background and Landscape: Research and understand how housing policies in your area affect the group that you are trying to engage. Explore any pipelines and structural systems that reinforce housing inequities. It is helpful to talk to local experts and community groups/leaders that have expertise.

Create a Group/Coalition: Create a list of housing advocates in your region that have specific community expertise. It is essential that you include individuals from the population you are trying to engage with.

Action: Meet with advocates and figure out what policies work and which do not. Create advocacy plans around policies that are missing or need improvement. Working groups can help coordinate efforts

Flexible Menu of Options and Engagement

This section provides some examples of opportunities to innovate that are intended to build upon and enhance existing activities, and importantly to provide a stronger foundation for the community to provide their own expert input.

Conceptually, one way to think of this section is as a 'multiple mains and sides to choose from' approach from a restaurant menu, as illustrated below. This is intended to provide maximum flexibility to a range of municipalities.

This approach acknowledges that resources are scarce, that what works in one area may not be applicable in another, and that certain approaches may be better suited to particular situations. Additionally, that different combinations of engagement may make more or less sense in various situations/localities. An important note is that all of the following options have an important role to play, and all result in different outcomes.

Choose from the Following

Public Meeting

Public meetings are held to engage a wide audience in information sharing and discussion.

Open Meeting

Open meetings are open to public observation, participation, and comment.

Facilitated Workshop

Workshop facilitation means providing objective guidance to a group in order to collaboratively progress towards a goal.

Charrette

A charrette is a collaborative and intense planning process that draws on the talents and energies of all interested parties to create and support a plan.

Community Forum

A community forum is a local forum made up of residents, community groups, local officials, and local businesses to work together to address issues facing particular neighborhoods.

"Combination Menu" Options

Option A

Choose any two meetings

Option B

Choose any two meetings plus a workshop

Option C

One meeting plus any two workshops or charrettes

Option D

Choose four of any type

A la carte sides
Remote (phone/Internet) options

Modalities of Engagement

Leverage Local Media

Advertise meetings through local media (many also use social media) that provide information to historically underserved communities. Consider media outlets and news sources that may be specific to particular communities (e.g., local newsletters, chat services/apps, local networks).

Leverage Ethnic Social Media

Engage and leverage ethnic social media (e.g., Facebook Groups, WeChat, WhatsApp). This can help broaden reach, particularly as it provides language support, and inherently helps tap into specific networks.

Offer Child Care

Offering on-site child care can increase the participation of women, low-income individuals, and other populations positively affected by child care services.

Language services

Offer translation of outreach language, related materials, and meetings based on community demographics.

Friendly locations

Host meetings, workshops, and other outreach activities in locations that are easily accessible via various modes of (motorized and non-motorized) transportation, and are appropriate to the community's needs (e.g., if there are religious considerations).

Community Friendly Times

Hold meetings at times when people can participate (e.g., after work and weekends). Consider opening up comment periods outside of typical time frames (e.g., 24-48 hour blocks) so that individuals can process information at their own pace, ask questions, and provide input/comments when they can.

Partnerships

Creating/establishing partnerships with trusted community leaders/messengers (e.g., promotoras/community health workers) can help increase trust and participation. It can also help engage traditionally hard-to-reach populations

Develop Local Leadership & Provide Incentives

Developing leadership from within communities themselves helps create pipelines for continued engagement and follow-through, and helps establish ownership of the process and the outcome. This can be formal or informal, and can include volunteer opportunities. Providing incentives can help encourage participation and can go beyond tangible things like monetary rewards or tax breaks. They can be purpose-driven (e.g., fulfillment of personal goals), social (e.g., related to socializing or camaraderie), or related to status (e.g., recognition, appreciation for hard work).

Remote Options

Websites

Advertise meetings through local media (many also use social media) that provide information to historically underserved communities. Consider media outlets and news sources that may be specific to particular communities (e.g., local newsletters, chat services/apps, local networks).

Social Media

Instagram Live, Facebook Live, LinkedIn, NextDoor (app). Engaging trusted community leaders/messengers can help broaden reach as well as legitimize social media messaging originating from municipal communications outreach. This type of social media outreach can also help reach groups that are not plugged into traditional government outreach channels.

Ethnic Social Media

Facebook Groups, WeChat, WhatsApp. Can help gain access to hard-to-reach populations and provide legitimacy to outreach efforts. Can be particularly effective when combined with support of trusted messengers.

Emails/Listservs

Can reach a broad audience, provides opportunity to embed links or directly attach documents, and can be easily forwarded to other people

Online Call/Workshop

Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams, Google meet/hangouts. While the most robust options for each of these platforms involve payment, they all allow participation without having to physically get to a set location. Many can also be used via a smartphone.

Phone/VoIP lines

Can take messages 24/7 and can include pre-recorded messages with information. Plus is that there are ways to do this that do not require community members to pay a fee to call in, and municipalities can likely find no- or low-cost options to set up.

Surveys

Can be used to reach a large part of the population, and can be easily advertised via traditional and social media.

Text Messaging

Can be very useful for those who do not have a smartphone or do not have reliable Internet/data access.

For low–technology users

The digital divide is a pressing problem, which provides barriers to full use of available technology. While much of the population has access to a smartphone and some measure of a data plan, many others, particularly in rural areas, do not have access to complementary infrastructure. Notably, 2019 Pew Research Center data estimates that in the US any type of cellphone usage exceeds 95%, indicating that there is at least sufficient reach if you include any type of a cell phone.

Text message notifications can provide a way to both provide but also collect information. By allowing opt-in for notifications to access information reduces the need for a smartphone. It also can allow for providing input (e.g., "voting") by texting back a number. Ideally this will be set up so there are no data/usage fees involved. Telephone lines (can be a VoIP type service which may be more cost-effective, and/or can be automated) can also provide a way for non-smartphone users to get information as well as provide feedback. The phone lines can provide an answering machine-like service where individuals can leave comments or questions, and can be available 24/7.

Ready-to-Go Messaging

Here are some "standard" phrases in Spanish and Chinese that can be used to help increase awareness:

1. Housing Element 2021-2029
    a. Capítulo de Vivienda del Plan General 2021-2029
    b. 洛杉磯縣房屋政策藍圖 2021-2029
2. "Public Meeting"
    a.Junta Pública
    b.公共會議
3. "Community Meeting"
    a. Junta Communitaria
    b.社區會議
4. "Public Workshop"
    a. Taller Público
    b. 公共研討會
5. "Community Workshop"
    a.Taller Comunitario
    b. 社區研討會
6. "Meeting agenda has been posted"
    a. "La agenda de la junta fué publicada"
    b. 會議議程已公佈
7. "Meeting recording has been posted"
    a. "La grabación de la junta fué publicada"
    b. 會議報告已公佈
8. "Website" / "Phone Number" / "Social Media"
    a. "Sitio web / Número Telefónico / Redes Sociales
        i. Website: Sitio Web
        ii. Facebook: Facebook
        iii. Phone Number: Número Telefónico or just Teléfono: (xxx) xxx-xxxx
        iv. Social Media: Redes Sociales
        v. WhatsApp: WhatsApp
    b. Chinese:
        i. Website: 網站
        ii. Facebook: FB
        iii. Phone Number: 電話 or just 電: (xxx) xxx-xxxx
        iv. Social Media: 社群媒體
        v. WeChat: 微信

Types of Engagement

Public meetings

- Providing digital access to meeting agendas and other important documents via website landing page.
    - Creating a separate page on their organization's website that organizes and coordinates agendas, meeting minutes, and other essential information.
- Emails and other social media outreach with embedded links to documents like the meeting's agenda
    - LinkedIn is a professionally-oriented social media platform where stakeholders can be reached via professional channels
    - Facebook is a free online platform that has quick access links and wide reach.
    - The Nextdoor App is a free, useful, and popular platform to connect to neighbors within a specific community. It is useful to reach actual citizens in the community and not just activist organizations.
    - Affording citizens the opportunity to have direct access to agendas and other documents via email subscription could be extremely beneficial and cost effective. For instance, creation of a custom email (e.g., "publicacces@blank.org") can allow the public to subscribe to listservs as well as have a specific contact point. Setting up email lists allows sending out an automatic email to a set of individuals. These automatic emails can include agenda items and corresponding documents to individuals that are interested in the process and then allow them to respond with comments. This can help keep everything organized and keep everyone informed, as well as allow direct contact with community members.
- Providing online options (e.g., Zoom, WebEx) with integrated, easy-to-follow procedures on how to leave public comment in digital format.
    - Zoom (Chat section)
    - Email or phone call line to leave a public comment
    - Facebook Live (includes comment section) and Facebook Groups (includes comment section, and already groups individuals together by topic)
    - For youth participants, social media such as Instagram Live could be useful as it also has a comment section
- Post recordings of meetings on a website for public reference, including transcript of public comments. Categorizing materials (e.g., recordings, transcripts, any other corresponding documents) can aid in streamlining future searches. This may mean tagging things so they are easy to search for, or creating a specific page for a specific category (e.g., a page dedicated to meetings regarding the housing element)
    - These recordings can also be posted on social media such as Facebook.

Surveys

- Can be a cost-effective way to gauge public sentiments and perspectives

- Can be quickly disseminated via social media and other technology options (e.g., online forums/ bulletin boards, newsletters, emails), but also can be done via low- or no-tech (e.g., paper copies, text messaging, phone calls)
- Results can be posted online and made anonymous

Open meetings where people talk to planning experts

- Including experts (e.g., water, transportation, housing) to be available to answer questions from the community
    - Virtual town halls can be held via Zoom, Facebook Live or Instagram Live.
        - Start by choosing a platform (e.g., zoom). Post the zoom link to online social media such as Facebook or Instagram, including information about what the meeting is about and any corresponding links (e.g., agenda, supporting documents). Posting the information several days prior to the actual event allows the public time to digest the material and comment (both ahead of time and in real time). Comments can be made via email or the chat function built into online engagement platforms.
    - Utilizing multiple platforms, including social and traditional media, pushes advertising out to more individuals, and can increase awareness of what's going on and ways to participate in the process.

Facilitated workshops/meetings

- Incorporation of trusted members/messengers as liaisons to talk with community members. These trusted messengers can take the form of local nonprofits who can act as a bridge between community and government.
    - Workshops can be hosted on platforms like zoom, though notably these are often paid services. Facebook Live can be used to live-stream presentations as it allows for public comment or questions via an associated chat box.
    - Although in-person is more interactive, workshops can be pre-/recorded, allowing for questions. Additionally, incorporation of FAQ's can help with live or after-the-fact questions.

Community forums

- Incorporation of trusted members as liaisons to talk with community members
    - Wix forum is an online platform that can allow community members to provide public comment and voice concerns and insights, while also allowing trusted members to respond to or address these comments.
    - Consider the impact and reach of ethnic traditional and social media.

Visioning, charrettes, or workshops for goal setting, strategies, or designs

- Clear step-by-step guides on how to provide public comment
- Make public comments available online in written and verbal form.
- Online versions can be run via Zoom or Instagram Live, and additionally hosted on platforms like Facebook or organization websites. Increasing use of social media can help broaden the audience engaged.

Site-Specific Activation

- Provide background and context to highlight the site's unique features (assets as well as challenges)
- Provide opportunities for community members and leaders to take an active role in defining problem and associated solution statements
- Similar to workshops and charrettes, online versions can be run via Zoom or Instagram Live, as well as hosted on platforms like Facebook or organization websites. Social and local media can help broaden the audience.

For all of the above options, providing adequate time for the public to hear about the activity/meeting, digest any related information, and ask questions/provide comment is key. This may mean not limiting public comment to a specific set of hours during 8am-5pm, possibly opening comment periods to 24 or more hours, and/or allowing comments to be received via a variety of methods (e.g., in person, email, physical mail, online form, social media, phone line). Additionally, it is important that everyone - as much as possible - is able to engage on similar footing. This may mean offering a glossary of terminology, or considering alternative and accessible language to ensure broad understanding of the topic/activity at hand.

Recommendations

Civic Engagement Infrastructure

- Many cities already have trusted groups of messengers. Key staff can be instrumental in developing robust digital civic engagement infrastructure as well as providing expertise in reaching populations that are not engaged with digital platforms. This can take the form of creating a database of contacts, then building those relationships through other engagements outside of the housing element. It is important to note that a key aspect of this strategy is ensuring that the right individual is able to take the lead on various aspects. While it may not always be possible to find appropriate staff, openness and willingness to listen and learn are key traits and can be leveraged to start building relationships and trust.

- Provide planning process flowcharts. The full process is unfamiliar territory for most community members and as a result, most miss out on opportunities to provide input and engage.

- Create and maintain a current inventory of community organizations and key individuals. This can be useful to help identify who to engage for what issue, or who to approach to get suggestions on an appropriate point of contact for engagement.

- While consulting organizations/firms are often contracted to do engagement work, nonprofits have a deep understanding of community needs and can provide a different perspective than what is traditionally advocated.

- Work to establish long-term connections within communities. This can be done through existing relationships (e.g., continue to check-in after the particular initiative is complete) or through nurturing new relationships. While turnover and change is inevitable, working within communities over time will help create contacts that are not dependent on a particular staff member or community contact/leader.

Communications Infrastructure

- Create and maintain an online calendar that contains all meetings scheduled with links to agendas. This can help community members come better prepared to meetings and provide them with tools to more effectively engage.

- Create an e-newsletter that provides updates, and utilize trusted messengers to promote signing-up.

- Create social media pages to engage the public. These can be linked to e-newsletters.

- Create low-technology friendly options such as phone/call-in numbers or text messaging opt-ins.

- Make sure that information on how to participate in community meetings/workshops and/or public meetings is easily accessible (e.g., clearly marked on the landing page), contains clear and current instructions (e.g., includes step-by-step instructions accompanied by screenshots, clearly identifies the phone number to call for public comment/to listen in on meetings, indicates which options will accommodate which types of input), and is easily searchable on the web.

- Time is an important consideration. While there are many mandated deadlines that need to be met to complete all processes in time, providing the community with adequate notice about various engagement opportunities can help individuals make accommodations to carve out time. It can also decrease the risk that any government outreach is written off as fraud.

- Offer an opportunity to debrief and review any outcomes from engagement activities. Work to understand how data are received and interpreted by the community. Explain how the input was considered and what impact it had.

- Emails and other social media outreach with embedded links to documents like the meeting's agenda

Important Considerations

- Making information available that is understandable by an educated lay audience can be key to demystifying "technical jargon" and increasing accessibility. It can also help empower individuals to draw upon their own lived experiences, which is expertise in its own right.

- Inviting experts to talk to the community promotes a culture of information sharing and increases transparency. It can also help address power issues.

- Due to widespread fraud, often under the guise of the communication being from a government entity, many individuals may be distrustful of outreach efforts, particularly those that come via social media, text messaging, or phone calls. It is important to understand that many communities who are already wary of government representatives are also often heavily targeted by scammers, adding to hesitation about any information not received from a trusted source. This could be an opportunity for city council representatives or other public service representatives to increase their visibility, and lay the foundation for outreach and dialogue within communities. Trusted messengers can also help validate outreach efforts.

- Inviting community networks that are affected by decisions (e.g., trusted community messengers include PTA boards and tables) can help broaden the reach, including getting to a more comprehensive cross-section of participants

- Trusted messengers are trusted community members (e.g., neighborhood organizations, community-based organizations) who can act as intermediaries. They can serve as key liaisons to talk with community members

- Community mapping can help identify points of need, assets that can be leveraged, as well as identify key organizations/individuals
- Creating a database/inventory of community organizations and key individuals can help identify appropriate contacts for various initiatives and community engagement needs
- What is the current organizational culture of the public agency (e.g., staff attitudes, support from senior management and politicians)? While resource availability is a key component, the willingness to improve (which also "requires a tolerance of risk and acceptance of failure") is also crucial
- What is the current political climate? While there may be the best of intentions, political will is also important.
- Conflict is not a bad thing; in fact, it is a natural and integral part of the process. Consider how conflict is approached and managed.
- Consider incentivizing hired consultants to collaborate with local trusted community experts who hold values of equity and inclusion, and who engage with the community on a consistent basis. Because consultants are not always aware of the full range of community resources available (this includes the lived experiences of community members themselves), it can be helpful to make sure that planners and the consultants they hire are on the same page.
- For those who are not used to providing public comment, the process can be extremely confusing and intimidating. Providing clear instructions and clarifying expectations upfront can help make the process easier. This is particularly important when utilizing online and social media options, which many may not be familiar with or comfortable engaging. Additionally, making sure that instructions are easily understandable to a lay audience can help demystify the process and make it less intimidating.
- Consider performance measures to address accountability
- Make sure to express appreciation!

Appendix

A. Literature Review

> Public participation is ostensibly also about fairness and justice. There are systematic reasons why the least advantaged groups' needs and preferences are likely to be unrecognized through the normal analytic procedures and information sources of bureaucrats, legislative officials and planners. These needs may only come onto their radar screen when an open public participation process occurs. So public participation gives at least the opportunity for people to be heard who were overlooked or misunderstood in the early stages.
>
> – Innes and Booher, 2000

Planners have long sought after the 'ideal' of planning, be it through approaches such as advocacy, communicative, or participatory. As the profession has sought to more adequately include a range of voices (e.g., Davidoff, 1965; Healey, 1992; Umemoto, 2001; Innes, 1995; Forester, 1982), much attention has been devoted to information transfer, issues of power/power dynamics, quality and range of engagement, relationship-building, and cultural considerations.

There are various ways to conceptualize public engagement and participation. Realistically, much of what happens is due to some combination of habits and expectations (Innes and Gruber, 2001). Some of this is due to, and some of this is in anticipation of, the "messiness" of the process itself (Rittel and Webber, 1973; Lachapelle, McCool, and Patterson, 2003; Head and Alford, 2015; Christensen, 1985; Cartwright, 1973). However, because participation is deemed important, some baseline version of this is mandated in almost every planning process.

An important point to acknowledge is that "successful" planning is twofold: producing a product, but also a productive, collaborative, and inclusive social climate. This second aspect can involve "learning, relationship building, ownership" (Lachapelle, McCool, and Patterson, 2003), "collaboration, dialogue and interaction" (Innes and Booher, 2004); but also addressing fairness, creating responsibility, and ensuring representation (McCool and Guthrie, 2001; Burby, 2003). And because power in all its forms is a crucial consideration (Arnstein, 1969; Forester, 1982; Davidoff, 1965), the path to getting to (some form of) consensus for these "good plans" is a key part of the process. This is particularly important when considering that much of the evolution regarding the importance placed upon and the methods to obtain participation are a direct result of the planning process - and its resultant policies/actions - having been historically exclusionary and focused on the desires of the few but powerful.

In many ways, the issue of power is central to the need for participation. This is largely due to the disjoint between simply going through the motions of participation versus "having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process. (Arnstein, 1969)" While participation is mandated in many situations, it is all too often one-sided as "often the process stops with the education of the public and does not proceed to the education of the agency. (Innes and Booher, 2000)"

Part of the issue in addressing participatory approaches is the way participation is solicited. Efforts such as public meetings, which are mandated to ensure that there is at least a baseline level of effort provided on behalf of municipalities to provide a forum to both disseminate information as well as provide the public a chance to provide input, have proven to be only so effective. The most common critique is that common methods of engagement do not achieve genuine participation, which in turn means that public officials are not receiving the information they need to make informed decisions (Innes and Booher, 2000).

While there are a few studies that have studied citizen participation, the 2003 study Mandating Citizen Participation in Plan Making by Brody, Godschalk, and Burby provided one of the more detailed examinations of what works and why. The authors identified several key choices: percentage of staff time devoted to citizen involvement, the amount of objectives emphasized, the amount and mixture of meetings and techniques employed, if the setting was informal versus formal, how many types of information were provided, and the amount of techniques used.

In general, the main takeaways were that long-term investment matters; that citizens responded positively to a range of objectives and information presented to them; and that a greater amount of types, settings, and mixtures of techniques results in greater engagement. These observations tie back in to points about power (e.g., see Arnstein, 1969 and Forester, 1982 for a general discussion), and underscore the importance of collaborative dialogues that result in collective decisions (Innes and Booher, 2000; Booher and Innes, 2002)

Similarly, a 2008 study by Laurian and Shaw on the evaluation of public participation practices found that while public hearings are among the most widely used methods, they were deemed one of the least influential. The authors hypothesized that this was likely due to the nature of a typical hearing, i.e., mostly providing information and gathering public comments (if any) without deliberation.

Additionally, accommodations such as language services, holding meetings outside of typical business hours, and posting minutes/notes were identified as important in other types of engagement scenarios (e.g., transportation, education).

Part of the issue with participatory approaches is the typical lack of associated evaluation. While participation is a (mandated) part of the process, evaluation is not. This poses some central problems, as it is not always clear that the approaches chosen have had any meaningful impact on the outcome. This brings up another conceptual question - what is actually being evaluated? In general, evaluation tends to be either based on the success of the outcome or on process (e.g., Conrad, 2011; Chess and Purcell, 1999). Similarly, Bierele (2000) found that evaluation typically could be categorized into two types - assessing the quality of the process rather than its outcomes, and those that are interest-oriented. In response they presented a third: the extent to which participation programs were able to achieve goals broadly linked to societal interest. This proposed reconceptualization was largely due to the authors' observation that public involvement ideally can reconcile the conflict between expert-based decision-making which is seen as out of sync with the public, and frustration due to conflict caused by competing interests. Similarly, Innes and Booher (1999) identified high-quality agreements, and tangible and intangible products, as results of effective consensus building. They also argue that processes and outcomes cannot be separated, as they are realistically tied together.

Granted, there is some question about evaluation, generally, considering that there's considerable variation on the idea of what is a "good" plan (Alexander and Faludi, 1989; Baer, 1997), and the gap between what monitoring and evaluation is ideal (e.g., what the literature calls for) versus what may in fact be realistic (Seasons, 2003).

B. Design Considerations

Surveys

Why a survey? Surveys help gauge the representativeness of individual views and experiences. Surveys provide hard numbers on your audiences' opinions and behaviors that can be used to make important decisions. Surveys can also reach populations that may be underrepresented and have a less prominent voice in the general public. They can be translated into various languages, helping broaden the reach.

Surveys can be custom-designed and deployed to fit a specific organization's needs, utilizing current research standards. Once responses are collected, the results can be analyzed to create short reports and/or slide decks for presentations that can be live or posted electronically.

Survey design tips

- Make every question count
- Keep questions short and simple, not overly verbose
- Avoid leading and biased questions
- Be sure to include appropriate language versions of the survey, also make sure your questions are culturally relevant for the population of respondents
- Ask specific demographic questions so you can better understand different populations that took your survey
- Test your survey before launching!

Charrettes/Workshops

Why a charrette/worship? These are good ways to roll up sleeves and dive into topics. Because they are meant to be very interactive and solicit discussion, they can include things like large sheets of paper and markers or simply putting post-it notes on a wall to solicit and organize thoughts. They are especially useful because they can also be tailored to fit budget, time, and resource constraints. Although these are traditionally done in person, they can be run online utilizing chat features or call-in lines. The key here is to engage community members and stakeholders, and ensure that everyone is aware that every voice counts, all opinions are valid, and that it is OK to not agree on everything.

Charrette/Workshop Design Tips

- Inviting and involving key stakeholders can help address representation
- Consider using tools that are audience-friendly and don't require prior knowledge (e.g., pens and markers as opposed to digital devices)
- Think about what information is being provided upfront; not everyone may be coming to the table with the same understanding, background knowledge, or expertise
- Mutual respect is key to everyone feeling safe and comfortable sharing their opinions. It is important to convey that no opinion is greater or more valid than another's
- Be creative! There are no hard-and-fast rules about how these should be run, what they should look like, what they should result in.

C. Measurement, Learning, and Evaluation

Evaluation of participatory processes is crucial to better understanding aspects such as what questions need to be asked, who needs to be engaged, and what type of engagement is most effective in which circumstances. There are many ways that evaluation can be approached, and the following list are just one set of example questions that can help municipalities better understand both their processes as well as the outcomes.

A few things to keep in mind

- How are goals and inputs, and outputs and outcomes related?
- What are the main goals of the engagement? Consider the role of values, conflict among competing interests, and trust
- How is "success" measured? Is it solely outcome based? Is it solely based on acceptance of a particular outcome? Is it solely process based?
- How committed is the agency to establishing and increasing engagement? Is the agency likely to use the engagement strategy/effort as a platform for more/sustained engagement, soliciting more ideas and recommendations?
- What is the 'quality' of communication? What do the information flows look like? Are there adequate opportunities for feedback to be provided? What is done with this feedback?
- How transparent is the process? Does the public fully understand the process, what needs to happen and when and why, etc.?
- How inclusive is the process? Who is involved/included? Who is not?
- How are fairness and power-sharing handled? Does any one group hold a monopoly?
- Does the quality of the decision incorporate a broad knowledge base and public input?
- Has the particular engagement method utilized increased community capacity and willingness to participate in the future? Or is it a one-off for just a specific purpose?
- Are the outcomes (e.g., costs and benefits) distributed equitably?
- Are participants engaged, able to produce creative ideas?
- Are there opportunities to both cultivate and establish leadership roles? Is there a full understanding of the types of incentives that either exist or could make sense in various scenarios?
- Are challenges to the status quo encouraged? Are there opportunities to learn and change, both within and external to existing groups?

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About the Center for Social Innovation

The Center for Social Innovation at UC Riverside provides a credible research voice that spurs civic leadership and policy innovation. We also aim to integrate researchers, community organizations, and civic stakeholders in collaborative projects and long-term partnerships that strengthen inclusion, sustainability, and equity. Importantly, the Center seeks to shift away from a "problem" narrative to an "opportunity" narrative for marginalized communities and localities.

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