Community Engagement Techniques

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On community engagement

The word “community” can be defined in various ways. It can be defined as a group of people that (1) live in the same geography or neighborhood and, (2) share similar identities, lived experiences or culture (e.g. the gay or the Latino community) and, (3) share an interest (e.g. faith, farming, playing bingo, etc.). One of the most critical aspects of “community” is that individuals come together in association with one another to reach common goals.

“Engagement” means an arrangement to do something. Inclusive community engagement is a continuous process. A planner (or a connector, a gapper, to use the Asset-Based Community Development “ABCD” language here) needs to pay attention to the methods and processes that enable relationships to blossom and strengthen trust over time. In order for community engagement to be inclusive, it should involve a variety of community members—including those who have been historically underrepresented in planning processes such as low income individuals or people of color. The planner needs to also recognize the different powers at hand in order to ensure that everyone has a voice in the planning process from the development of a master plans to the design of a public plaza.

Another reason for being inclusive is that many heads think together. Any time a group of individuals comes together they are going to bring with them a wide variety of experiences, interests, and skills that can be mobilized. All that being said, no plan can be successful without considering a broad “engagement” of the “community.” Community engagement also helps to prioritize community issues while finding practical and creative responses. The practice of engaging community members fosters collaboration which empowers individuals to make decisions about their future and not to accept plans passively. In the spirit of ABCD, it also helps the community to most effectively mobilize their assets and control the resources that exists within, that is, from the inside out.

Community engagement is often conceptualized as a (1) ladder (e.g., Sherry Arnstein’s Ladder of Participation, figure 3), (2) wheel (e.g., South Lanarkshire Council’s, figure 1) and, (3) spectrum (e.g., International Association of Public Participation, figure 2) with levels of increasing participation. Each level increases the degree of citizen control and thus, the empowerment of those who actively seek to participate in community work. This report employs specifically the International Association of Public Participation spectrum to offer some techniques that planners can use to engage with the community. The report also offers case studies of how primarily government agencies and other institutions engage the public in decision-making.
Figure 1. Adaptation of South Lanarkshire Council’s Wheel. Source: Editor.

Figure 2. Adaptation of International Association of Planning Participation Spectrum. Source: Editor.
Definitions of community

Like many other subjects, the use of the word “community” is subjective. What one person considers a community may be quite different than what another person considers a community. Take, for instance the definition of community for an older adult who only walks. He or she might define their community as just their block, composed by this or her most immediate neighbors. Now, consider an older adult that only drives. His or her community might be more extensive and might include geographically the grocery store that he or she frequents along with the pharmacy, the senior center, and church. This same example could be applied for a community of interests. A Mexican woman might consider her Chicana book club her community while her husband might say that he found a group of compadres (brothers) at the Real Salt Lake Fan Club. Yet, both of them are part of the Latino community. It is important to keep in mind that every community is different, and people can consider themselves to be a part of different communities.

Even though the definition of community could be subjective, at the very least though, a broad definition of community should be given. That being established, we can define community as any group that consists of individuals who share common geography, culture, attitudes, interests, goals, etc.

When people come together for a reason, whether it is to address a community issue, or they enjoy the same hobbies, that builds community. Sometimes groups of people come together in association to address a community issue. Take for example protesting a school closure. This community or association may disband after achieving or not achieving their goal. There are millions of associations in the graveyard! They served their purpose for a time and now they have joined the many associations that are bones in a cemetery. Yet, after addressing a community issue, many associations may decide to stick together and continue to grow and adapt to different causes, challenges, and opportunities.

When engaging with the greater community, it is essential to ensure that every relevant group and subcommunity are given the option to join into discussions and voice their opinions, support, or concerns. It is important to remember that because communities are made up of diverse individuals, that engagement may be more challenging. But just because engagement might not occur instantaneously or without encouragement, does not mean not to try. When engaging with communities, be sure to be patient, because it takes time to build trust and meaningful relationships.

Taking an ABCD approach

Engaging with Diverse Communities points out that urban planners are trained to be problem solvers. That perspective, in combination with a tendency to rely on quantitative measures, means that they often see what a community is lacking rather than what they have to offer (García, Garfinkel-Castro, & Pfeiffer, 2019). While problems in the community certainly shouldn’t be ignored, taking a deficit-based approach can have a number of adverse effects. When residents feel deficient, it damages local relationships and causes the community to have poor self-image (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

In contrast, Asset-based Community Development (ABCD) focuses on what a community has to offer rather than what it lacks. The DePaul Institute defines it as a
“movement that considers local assets as the primary building blocks of sustainable community development” (ABCD Institute, 2019). With an ABCD approach, planners identify existing assets in the community, including individuals, associations such as environmental and health advocacy groups, and institutions such as schools or non-profits. Physical and economic assets should also be considered. These assets are then considered and relationships made between them—as the basic slide presentation from ABCD states, “successful neighborhood action is the result of assets that were not connected being connected” (ABCD Institute, 2019). Asset-based community development, when used appropriately, can lead to empowered citizens who feel heard and who believe that they can make a difference.

### Ladder of citizen participation

In 1969, the planner Sherry Arnstein developed a model designed to facilitate community engagement in planning (Arnstein, 1969). She referred to this model as the “ladder of citizen participation,” which can be seen in the image on the left. The goal of this model was to promote citizen power. Each rung on the ladder represents a step closer to citizen empowerment in community engagement methods. This ladder is designed to help communities move away from manipulative and controlling methods of community engagement towards much more democratic and citizen centered approaches. This ladder is vital to planning processes and allowing planners to conceptualize and evaluate community engagement practices. The point of this ladder is to help planners facilitate community engagement in a way that empowers citizens to make a meaningful decision without being manipulated or merely placated into silence. This ladder is especially crucial in considering the involvement of underrepresented or minority communities. By conceptualizing and evaluating engagement practices using this ladder, minority communities can be empowered to have a voice and shape their communities instead of being ignored, manipulated, or disregarded. Community engagement practices that are based on citizen empowerment result in much more equitable and beneficial outcomes to the community as a whole.
Designing community engagement

Ideally, planning is a concerted effort between stakeholders and outside parties to design strategies and goals for a variety of planning initiatives. Community planning is often an ongoing process and requires planners and communities at large to shift outcomes and expectations for any given project. Community engagement is recognized as a critical element of successful planning. However, many planning initiatives have difficulty effectively designing a collaborative community engagement process. Implementing a methodical but flexible framework for engagement can open a dialogue to difficult policy measures while establishing ongoing public collaboration to planning processes.

Community engagement can organically occur from opposition or support of a planning or policy initiative. It can also be intentionally designed into a collaborative planning project. There is a range of levels which communities can choose to participate in a project, from codesigning goals and methods to having a “boots on the ground” role in a project’s implementation. The benefits of designing community engagement into planning vary, but typically have positive trends, including:

1. A project which caters to a communities’ wants often has a higher success rate (in implementation) and a more sustainable outcome,
2. Communities feel a sense of pride over an outcome or progress made if they played a part in its enactment,
3. Less opposition to the planning body or local government involved with the planning initiatives,
4. More creative, resourceful, and feasible project outcomes if the community is engaged in a transparent planning process.

Planners and project organizers can design public involvement and engagement around anticipated outcomes (e.g., healthy cities, sustainability, smart cities, walkability) and can see dual success in a community’s pride over a project while meeting a project’s main goals. It is important from the beginning to ensure that all necessary parties are being heard, and no traditionally marginalized community’s wants are being overlooked or underrepresented throughout the process. A carefully designed community engagement process is often beneficial for starting a dialogue between stakeholders and mediating public engagement through meetings, surveys, panels, and other forms of successful and ongoing communication.

Deciding on a purpose and scope

Planning requires an in depth knowledge of the community and the issues that it faces. A key component of this is developing relationships with residents who live or work in the area. Effective planning needs input from the community, along with the guidance of the professional planner to be successful. By making connections with the community, we can be sure that all voices are heard and that the true wants of the people are being met. This process also positively strengthens relationships that will thus encourage growth through change. This is especially important when including groups who have felt marginalized in the past. It is important to note that the scope of the project will determine the level of engagement that is required.
Improving the community is perhaps the overarching purpose of community engagement. However, involvement serves a multitude of purposes. These include (1) building relationships within the community, (2) finding common ground between conflicting interests, (3) establishing a connection and a level of trust between the public and the planning entity and, (4) allowing for a variety of perspectives to be heard and accounted for.

**Choosing a strategy**

The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) could be beneficial for choosing a strategy for community engagement, depending on the purpose in mind. IAP2 could be visualized as a spectrum of participation in the sense that as we move from inform to empower, we also increase our public impact.

**Inform**

A planner’s first job in the community engagement process is to notify the residents that there are potential changes on the horizon and that they are invited and encouraged to be a part of the process. It is not a stage in which the public will participate, per se. Instead, it is a necessary step to prepare them to engage in the process later on. The goal of this stage is to raise awareness among the community and to educate the public on the issues.

Equity and inclusivity must be carefully considered and rigorously pursued in this stage to minimize (or hopefully, eliminate) any chance of excluding traditionally marginalized and underrepresented groups from the process. Such considerations include translation of materials, location, and timing of events, and the media were chosen for advertisements, to name a few.

**Social Media**

![Image of a person typing on a laptop]

*Figure 4. “Women Typing on the Notebook, Free Stock Photo.” https://www.pexels.com/photo/women-typing-on-the-notebook-6168/*
Overview

As crucial as informing community members is, it can be challenging to reach everyone. Social media is a relatively new but growing tool that can help increase access to relevant information for many citizens. According to the Pew Research Center, approximately 7 in 10 Americans now use at least one social media site (Pew Research Center, 2019). Thus, social media can be a handy outreach tool, if used effectively. Social media can also be used beyond the “inform” stage of outreach and can become a place for discussion and participation in its own right; a continued social media presence can, therefore, become a consistent source of information for community members throughout the engagement process.

Appropriateness

Social media is appropriate for informing citizens at any level of involvement, but should be used in conjunction with other outreach tools and should not replace face to face interaction (Dozier, Hacker, Silberberg, & Ziegahn, 2019). As with any other device, it will take time to build trust using social media.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEAKNESS</th>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Requires internet access</td>
<td>Cost effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often requires users to have social media accounts</td>
<td>Quick dissemination of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potentially requires moderator</td>
<td>Can reach diverse populations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibility of people misrepresenting themselves</td>
<td>Beneficial for visual learners</td>
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Case Study #1: Topeka, Kansas

The City of Topeka, Kansas, has used social media to increase interest and trust in the government by using a specific hashtag (#Topekatweetalongs) to showcase different city employees and their jobs. By highlighting various departments and their tasks and by blending information and humor, the City of Topeka government began to interact with the community more effectively. Before starting the campaign, Topeka had experienced a contentious issue that caused some division in the community. Doug Gerber, the Deputy City Manager for Topeka said of their social media campaign, “There were strong opinions on both sides of the issue which had caused tension. This was a way for Topeka to deliver a message on their terms positively and enticingly.”
The hashtag was used not only to give the public a behind the scenes look at government jobs but also to promote public meetings and events. The public reaction to the #Topekatweetalongs campaign was positive, and the community began to interact more often both online and through in person meetings. Another unforeseen benefit of the campaign was that while employees had been reluctant initially to participate, they eventually grew excited about the campaign and about learning more about each other’s roles, so within the city offices themselves there was a stronger sense of camaraderie.

**Case Study #2: Nanaimo, British Columbia**

The City of Nanaimo started working on its online engagement efforts in 2009 in an effort to make decision making more accessible to the public, to inform the community of upcoming events, and to increase engagement with council meetings specifically. To achieve this, the city posted videos of meetings on its website, including live streaming, and archived videos that included time stamping so that people could easily find and share moments that were important to them. The city also has a presence on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. The Facebook page and Twitter account have been used primarily to inform community members about arts and recreational activities, post occasional surveys, and links back to the city’s YouTube account. Importantly, the city of Nanaimo researched its population before beginning its campaign to ensure that it was feasible and were flexible throughout the process. In one instance, they used a certain app as an incentive program for local events, but realized that they did not have enough users to make it worthwhile and stopped expending resources on it.

Nanaimo has a population of 80,000 and reported “extremely low” attendance at council meetings before beginning their social media presence. In 2010, between 50 and 200 people watched a video of the meetings, representing a “tenfold increase in council meeting viewings” compared to attendance (Fergusson, Verlaan, & Haas Lyons, 2012). The city attributed this success to a few things. One was that the videos were posted prominently on the homepage of the city website. Another was that the video time stamping corresponded to meeting notes, so that residents could quickly access topics that they were interested in and share those with friends and followers on whatever site they chose.
Traditional Media


Overview

Traditional media is another method used to inform community members about elements of the public involvement process. Traditional media includes television, print, and radio programming. These media are ubiquitous and capable of reaching broad and diverse audiences. This method does not require access to internet enabled devices or the creation of accounts on specific websites and is therefore capable of reaching different groups than social media. Since they generally reach diverse audiences, the two are complementary. The integrated use of traditional and social media can optimize the reach of a community engagement program.

The primary uses for traditional media are advertising for other community engagement events and reporting back on the outcomes of those events. This method is great for generating interest and increasing attendance and participation at events. It is
often explicitly stated in an organization’s public participation plan that it will use print, radio, and television for public notices. Traditional media will often be a community member’s first exposure to a planning issue, so it serves a dual purpose: informing people that there is an issue to be discussed, and how, when, and where they can go to learn more and get involved.

**Appropriateness**

This method is appropriate at any stage of any community engagement effort. It is particularly useful for disseminating information about the time, location, and general topics of other upcoming community engagement opportunities, and reporting chronological progress of community engagement efforts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEAKNESSES</th>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Impersonal</td>
<td>• Capable of reaching a broad audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Difficult to gauge the effectiveness</td>
<td>• Can generate local interest at the beginning of the community engagement process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No actual engagement</td>
<td>• Low cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Excludes people who don’t watch T.V., listen to the radio, or read the newspaper</td>
<td>• Easily replicable</td>
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**Case Study #1: 2018 Nashville Transit Referendum**

Nashville, Tennessee has been growing at a fantastic rate since 2010. As often happens, that immense growth has been accompanied by a similar increase in traffic congestion. People began worrying about “becoming the next Atlanta,” not a city well known for its quick travel times. So, when the city announced a referendum to raise funds to improve the public transit system, many people were optimistic about its chances. Initial voter polls showed strong support for the plan, entitled Let’s Move Nashville. However, when the dust settled after election day, the measure was defeated by a 2 to 1 margin. What went wrong?

One big problem with the process was the lack of community engagement (TransitCenter, 2019). The plan was mainly developed in a vacuum before any participation was sought from the public. There was no television, radio, or print ads notifying Nashville’s residents of opportunities to engage in the plan making process. There were no announcements on the local evening news of meetings to provide feedback or even to learn about the plan. The only engagement efforts came after the plan had been completed. Ads for these community meetings were plentiful, so the meetings were well attended. But they came too late in the process and were more looking for a rubber stamp from the community rather than any actual input or feedback. This shortcoming opened up the plan to criticism from the opposition and ultimately contributed to its failure.
The city is now returning to the drawing board to draft a new transit plan. Time will tell if those in charge have learned from their mistakes.

**Case Study #2: 2018 Lakeway Transit Plan**

The East Tennessee Human Resources Agency (ETHRA) is scheduled to begin service for a fixed route public transit system in Morristown, TN in October of 2019 (Moore, 2018). This development would come more than a year after the Lakeway Area Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organization, working with the City of Morristown and the Tennessee Department of Transportation, first hired a consultant to perform a feasibility study and draft a recommended plan. Unlike the Nashville transit plan, which was largely devised in the Mayor's ivory tower out of the public view, the Lakeway Transit plan included public involvement before the final draft of the plan was completed.

The development of the plan included community engagement in the form of two public meetings and a survey. The meetings were announced online and in the Citizen Tribune newspaper. The survey was available online, advertised in the Citizen Tribune, and printed and distributed in important locations around the community such as the library and city hall. Thanks to this diverse distribution, even though only 23 people attended the public meetings, over 180 survey responses were received (AECOM, 2018). This use of media raised awareness of the study within the community and, since residents were asked for input, contributed a sense of legitimacy to the final plan.

**Public Meeting**

![Figure 7](https://www.chelseama.gov/sites/chelseama/files/uploads/chelsea_creek_municipal_harbor_plan_and_dpa_master_plan.pdf)

*Figure 7. This is public meetings pic in Chelsea, MA - Source: https://www.chelseama.gov/sites/chelseama/files/uploads/chelsea_creek_municipal_harbor_plan_and_dpa_master_plan.pdf*

While engagement can be productive to a community, it may be difficult for the practitioners to fulfill public participation. Some many approaches and strategies provide the practitioners with ways to navigate toward active engagement. These tools aid the planner to meet a level of involvement in the planning process. One of these levels is informing the community, which is primary participation. Informing can be reached through various methods, including an open house, social media, traditional media, print materials, and public meetings.

The public meeting is a traditional method to bring people together to collaborate on a specific issue. It provides a community with the opportunity to bring various stakeholders together for a particular goal. It gives the community the chance of information sharing, questioning, and discussing an issue or a proposal. If Public meetings have been done well, they can build a feeling of community. Public meetings can be used at any size and
do not need to follow any agenda or script (The United States Environmental Protection, 2019). However, small group discussions in a public meeting can be held to help people feel more confident to speak and share ideas. For example, people who speak English as a second language, may not feel confident to speak in front of the public. Therefore, the small groups are essential to engage the community effectively.

**Appropriateness**

It would be better to consider a series of meetings rather than a single meeting. The meetings have to be publicized and advertised. The information about the meetings and their records should also be disseminated in places where the community go for their community information. This public sharing will show openness and transparency.

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<tr>
<th><strong>WEAKNESS</strong></th>
<th><strong>STRENGTHS</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>• Only a small population of the community may have the time and concerns to attend the meetings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Some attendants may not have enough confidence to speak and express their thoughts in front of a large group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• People participate in the meetings only when they have deep concerns about the issue. Therefore, participants of the meetings may not come from a broad range of interests in which they can be account as the representative of the community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Conflicts may happen and be deepened during the meetings and limit the contributions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide a large number of people with the opportunity to share their thoughts, ideas, and concerns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide an opportunity to discuss the processes, to share information, and to get feedback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide the opportunity to build consensus for support and action on complex issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide the opportunity to develop networks and to demonstrate transparency</td>
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**Case Study #1: Walk, Bike, Hike Plan in Somerset County, NJ**

This plan aims to support the development of the bike and walk trails across Somerset County, which is funded by the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA). The plan will help the County to create an integrated network of multi use paths to connect the users to broad destinations and services in the region. The project attempted to have effective community engagement throughout different tools, including study advisory groups focus groups, community events, English as a Second Language class group discussions, senior mobility groups, youth leadership, and public meetings. With the help of these various events, the County found the community’s widespread support and interest in the plan.
This project hosted two public meetings on the County administration building until August 2019. In each meeting, the participants were provided with information, goals, and visions of the project. At the first meeting, in November 2019, they offered public with an overview of the project and takeaways from public engagements through surveys and focus groups. The city got public comments and answered their questions, as well as having an interactive review of the work products with the study team. In the second meeting on April 2019, reviewed the draft of the planning framework. Various information, including meeting agenda, presentations, maps, visions, and goals, are all published on the website of the County. There is contact information in each meeting’s presentation and on the website for the public to get information or ask questions about the project (Somerset County, 2019).

Case Study #2: Chelsea Municipal Harbor Plan and Designated Port Area (DPA) Master Plan, Chelsea, MA

This plan aims to protect shorelines for water dependent industrial uses. This plan attempts to enhance public access, increase the living wage jobs for Chelsea’s residents, preserve the commercial and industrial aspects of the waterfront, and encourage water based industries which helped the local economy based on tax payments. A core group, including community members and stakeholders, also helped plan development as a part of the planning group. This core group includes various participants with different interests, including industry, the city, environment, and so on. This group met six times throughout six months to advise the planning team on public participation.

In the planning process, community members attended three public meetings to learn more about the harbor plan and the DPA master plan and to share their ideas. The total population of 77 individuals attended the three public meetings. The planning process description, project’s information, and the proposed strategies review were covered in the meetings. Both sessions included bilingual content, including English and Spanish, to help effective community engagement. The meetings were announced through media, the city’s website, and the project website. The handouts and presentations of the meetings, and meeting summaries are provided throughout the project’s website. It helped a broad range of the population to have access to the project’s information and the public participation process. The website also offers contact information for those who were not able to attend the meetings but liked to learn more about the plan (Chelsea Municipal Harbor Plan and Designated Port Area Master Plan, 2019).

Consult

After informing the community, consulting is a next important step. The purpose of consulting in community engagement is “to hold meetings after the target community becomes more receptive to and aware of development efforts that may affect them” (García et al., 2019). In this step, the work of planners is not providing information anymore; it becomes more consultative and requires more negotiation. Contrasting with the step of informing the members of the community are more active in consulting. It is an entry point for the public to participate in the planning process.

In consulting the planner is asking for feedback from participants. He or she is analyzing the feedback, and then figuring out practical and possible solutions to move
forward in the final decision making process. Meanwhile, the planning agency should also always keep public community members notified of any updates regarding the decision making process step by step. Moreover, taking a careful listen patiently at the community’s opinion would be also significant to their planners’ knowledge conservation and send planners’ feedback back to the community for further exchange in opinions.

**Citizen Panel**

**Overview**

A citizens’ panel is a demographically representative group (e.g., individuals from diverse backgrounds including gender identity, age, income, race, ethnicity, religious, political views, etc.) selected at random to inform decision making processes. The panel is composed of citizens anywhere from 500 to 5,000 who are polled often online in different specialized issues to understand the public viewpoint.

Therefore, citizen panels can be used to understand preferences before the planner crafts a policy or prepares an entire housing plan, for example. Some citizen panels can be used to inform government decision making results, city planning blueprint, or zoning design. A lot of scientific research has been conducted employing citizen panel and they found out that this method can be trusted for informing or evaluating decision making procedures in government or other institutions.

**Appropriateness**

It can be used when targeted, and representative public participation is needed.

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<tr>
<th><strong>WEAKNESS</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>• Same panel members would necessarily mean a lack of diversity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Full participation is not mandatory for everyone</td>
<td>• Flexible participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Repeated participation will wear out members of the panel</td>
<td>• High time efficiency in conveying opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cannot monitor fluctuation in each person’s opinion</td>
<td>• Shared information would be more accurate</td>
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**Case Study #1: Ontario Canada Renewable Energy Project**

In this example from the Ontario Canada Renewable Energy Project stakeholders initially believed that their opinions had not been heard or their ideas had not been considered. In addressing their concerns, planners finally organized a citizen panel for hearing process and then got mutual trust and support among community members, government, and developers. Planners allowed all participants to express their opinion and navigate them through the planning decision making process. At the end, all members of the citizen panel were offered an opportunity to influence the final decision-making process, and most of them truly contributed to the planning outcome.
Case Study #2: Swedish new energy construction plan

An innovative energy plan was created and stemmed from a specific research project with the guidance from the Swedish Environmental Protection agency’s program. This program provided people with useful methods to conduct the evaluation process of entire decision making scheduling. The initial draft plan of new energy initiative had been delivered out to community members for feedback, and then diverse opinions regarding this initial draft came out for further heated discussion based on a citizen panel. While discussing the new energy plan during the meeting from a citizen panel, the planners’ basic idea was to create an agenda for revision to the original energy planning process, and multiple studios had been built up with the accompanying of professional experts in order to allow more equitable public participation among a citizen panel.

Community Survey


Overview

The community survey is a usual method in the phase of consulting. According to the Community Toolkit, the steps for developing and administering a community survey are: “1) defining the sample size and the type of information required, 2) deciding on the type of survey to be used, 3) survey design, 4) piloting the survey, and 5) undertaking the survey and post completion analysis of the results” (Community Places, 2014). The survey questions should be clear and short, to reduce the time which respondents may spend on it. The survey results help planners to understand the demands of community members and gathering useful information for deciding the future.

Moreover, the community survey is an effective method to receive feedback from targeted members. However, the efficiency of gathering information and the rate of
response depends on the types of distributing surveys. Paper surveys such as those in the newspaper and a sheet with a few questions are the most common ways of distribution. The paper type looks more conventional, but it increases the difficulty in distribution. Besides, the online survey is more popular than the conventional one now. Planners put their surveys on some online platforms such as Survey Monkey. Online surveys are easy to access by clicking a website link and scanning a QR code. Notwithstanding, some respondents, especially older adults or low income individuals without access to a person computer, may hard to use the Internet and access online surveys.

**Appropriateness**

The community survey has a primary limitation because it cannot provide meaningful community engagement. It should be supplementary of other methods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEAKNESS</th>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The rate of response relies on the types of distribution</td>
<td>• Providing evidence if planners try to make decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The questions of the survey should be clear and short enough</td>
<td>• Easy to gather quantitative data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Language can be a barrier</td>
<td>• It reflects the demands and information of most people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It cannot provide a real sense of community engagement</td>
<td>• Distributing very fast and easy to access by using the Internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Saving data for comparing in the future</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Case Study #1: Austin, Minnesota**

In 2016, the City of Austin, Minnesota, surveyed immigrants, refugees, and minorities for investigating the knowledge of climate change and its impacts on them. The city authorized a local non for profit organization called “Welcome Center,” to handle this survey program. Austin changed a lot in the demographic field, more and more immigrants and people who speak little or no English came to the city. The city considered this demographic change and found the change did not reflect on public participation and planning processes. Then, the city started to work on the non-English speaking respondents. The Welcome Center provided a multi-language survey to non-English speaking immigrants and refugees and helped them to complete the survey by using respondents’ native languages. After this survey program, the city noticed a few issues such as immigrants and refugees are hard to understand handouts and submit a rebate application because these forms and handouts are only English. This survey program does not only help the City of Austin to receive the data they need but also improves the quality of public work in Austin.

**Case Study #2: “I Value,” Hampton, Virginia**

Hampton, Virginia, has been focusing on community engagement for a long time. However, the budget shortfalls have troubled the city for many years. In 2012, the city
made a program of community engagement which called “I Value,” to help the city decide to decrease budget cost. The primary method of “I Value” is a community survey with multiple types: paper and online surveys. Also, decreasing the cost of the budget is not enough; creating more revenue is also vital to Hampton. The community survey does only work in reducing the budget but also affects in the direction of further investment in Hampton. Some of these survey results reflect the services and investments, which are the most residents feel interested. Over 400 to 500 community members were invited in this investigation and provided their ideas in this program. Developing tourism and libraries are the decisions which the community survey helped planners to make, and these decisions keep improving the income for the city of Hampton. The community survey does not only work in gathering information in Hampton but also helps the planner to decide the direction of further development.

![FY19-I-Value](https://hampton.gov/DocumentCenter/View/20839/FY19-I-Value?bidId=)

**Focus Groups**

**Overview**

One tool that can be used to facilitate community engagement is focus groups. This tool is a way of consulting with the community. While it is not sufficient on its own to promote citizen empowerment, because it does not involve the citizens as decision makers, it can be a very useful tool for gathering information from specific interest groups in the community. Focus groups are usually groups of 6 to 12 citizens or other stakeholders that are gathered together with a skilled facilitator guiding the discussion and they discuss a single topic or set of questions about a topic in depth. The purpose of a focus group is to elicit honest debate about a topic to understand people’s perceptions, feelings, and concerns about a particular issue. Focus groups are a useful way to encourage engagement from those community members that may be less confident or overshadowed in a larger group, like minorities whose voice may not usually be heard or people who may have a unique view on a certain issue. Focus groups can be great for encouraging active discussion among smaller groups, targeting hard to reach portions of the community (like youth and minorities), and navigating conflict in smaller group settings. However, with smaller groups, it can be harder to make sure that all stakeholders are represented in the discussion which can make the results less statistically representative of the community as a whole, and a skilled facilitator is required to make sure the discussion is balanced between more articulate and less articulate group members. Additionally, the welcoming environment of a focus group can facilitate
discussion and be a time and resource efficient way of identifying and clarifying key issues, but some people in the group may feel inhibited from expressing non-consensus views because of the smaller setting.

**Appropriateness**

It is appropriate if the planner needs to consult the community. It is designed to specifically concentrate on a single issue or a program of topics. Focus groups encourage discussion among those who may feel less confident in a larger group and certain interest groups can be targeted that otherwise might not come to public meetings (e.g. youth, immigrants, etc.).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEAKNESS</th>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• With small groups it is difficult to be sure that all stakeholders are represented</td>
<td>• Encourages active discussion in a welcoming environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can be dominated by articulate and confident individuals if not carefully facilitated</td>
<td>• Time and resource efficient way of identifying and clarifying key issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Requires experienced facilitators</td>
<td>• Conflict can be easily managed in a smaller group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Not guarantee to be statistically representative because of small numbers involved</td>
<td>• It’s designed for a specific purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Some people might feel inhibited of expressing their views</td>
<td>• Can be directly targeted at excluded and hard to reach populations for example young people or ethnic minorities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Case Study #1: Scottish Youth Crime Review**

Case studies are frequently used in real life. The Scottish Youth Crime Review were important focus groups because as youth who were initially labeled as offenders were given the opportunity of offering their perspective. Focus groups allowed others to listen to their discussion and understand their unique perspective to find ways to help young people to find hope in their future.
Case Study #2: Diálogo’s on Brownsville, Texas

Focus groups or small group discussions were a vital part of community engagement on the border in Brownsville, Texas. After a massively successful diálogo (a dialog) aimed at engaging in conversation about the most pressing issues affecting communities with increasing Latino populations, Texas A&M University partnered with the City of Brownsville to facilitate a series of focus groups referred to as pláticas (conversations). The diálogo was modeled in a very creative format that facilitated the interaction between and participation of more than 100 people, including city officials, government and nonprofit agency staff, and institutions from local, state, national, and international levels that engaged citizens and students from local high schools.

These pláticas were designed to help planners understand economic development issues surrounding local Latino vendor markets. Pláticas engaged local market vendors, market management, city officials, and community leaders. These opposite groups met together and discussed (1) What is the relevance of Latino markets to the local economy?, (2) What are the needs for improving Latino vendor opportunities in markets and in the city?, (3) What resources are available for Latino microbusiness ventures in markets and in the city? and, (4) How can the city improve Latino microbusiness ventures in markets and in the city? These discussions had a wide array of favorable results in allowing local leaders to understand the issues facing the Latino community. A wide variety of lessons could be learned from these pláticas also, which provided a strong foundation for future community engagement. Lessons learned included the idea that creating actual physical spaces where an open conversation happens is, perhaps, the most powerful tool available for planning in our communities, these spaces need to feel and be safe and welcoming for diverse groups, dialogues should include creativity in multiple ways, both in ideas and ways to implement them, the art of listening is key and needs to be emphasized, and that universities and colleges can positively impact communities by supporting an environment of inclusiveness and openness.

Art and Creativity

Overview

Art and creativity is one tool that is extremely useful in the planning world, both for overcoming limitations and for reaching diverse populations that are often the most affected by planning restrictions (“Creative Placemaking – Arts and Planning Toolkit,” 2019). Arts and Creativity can not only revitalize a community but can be an integrative force within the community through the promotion of festivals, cultural events, markets;
as well as promote collaborative efforts between artists and cultural and art organizations (“Creative Placemaking – Arts and Planning Toolkit,” 2019; NashvilleNext, 2015). Investment in Art and Creativity as a planning tool, whether through music, dance, cultural celebrations, and various types of artistic outlets and workshops results in what is known as ‘Creative Placemaking’ and “…generates social capital, new ideas, and community identity.” According to NashvilleNext.4 Creative Placemaking is defined as the goal of seeking to join geospatial locations and communities, whether adjacent or not, through cultural, artistic, and creative means.

**Appropriateness**

This is a tool that can be utilized and applied across a broad societal spectrum, and serve as a means to integrate otherwise disconnected hierarchical tiers of society; increasing inclusivity and representation. Art and creativity as a planning tool needs to be visualized as a prevailing and influential asset to successful community engagement. As a tool, it is applicable to every scale of planning and community engagement, as well as within the context of a dynamic and diverse social strata. Utilizing art and creativity as a community engagement tool is further described in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEAKNESS</th>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* May be subjectively disempowering to individuals experiencing a lack of cultural, creative, or artistic identity</td>
<td>* Encourages community members and individuals to express values, ideas, and future expectations in those less verbally vocally empowered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* May be perceived as exclusively group or non-group modes of engagement, and thus potentially non-inclusive in that capacity</td>
<td>* Can be seen as a way to reach youth and other populations, such as cultural minorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Indeterminate population growth and tourism effects on city resources</td>
<td>* Promotes healthy community ties and dynamic interrelationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* May not reach certain age groups</td>
<td>* Can reflect city and community identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Economic advantages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Case Study #1: City of San Francisco**

Both of the following case studies focused on creative placemaking as the foundation of the planning efforts they were working towards. The first case study examined was set in San Francisco, California, where a planning committee sought to enliven Market Street—a quintessential public thoroughfare. The project within this study is called the Better Market Street project and is led by several various governmental and non-governmental community organizations. As defined by the *Arts and Planning Toolkit*, this project is “…a planning and design strategy that draws inspiration from the local community to create public spaces that promote health, happiness, public engagement, and well-being” (“Creative Placemaking – Arts and Planning Toolkit,” 2019). The City and County of
San Francisco coordinated with a local arts center to engage the community in this particular case study.

**Case Study #2: Portland, Maine**

The second case study was set in Portland, Maine, where an arts organization put together a community celebrated event that centered around performance art in response to immigration politics. *Arts and Planning Toolkit* describes this creative placemaking project as seeking to “improve municipal government through strategic arts projects with municipal employees, elected officials, and local artists” (“Creative Placemaking – Arts and Planning Toolkit,” 2019).

These case studies reiterate the applicability of arts and creativity as not only a viable tool within the planner’s toolkit as a way to engage the community but ultimately as a fundamental tool within that toolkit.

*Figure 11. Images featured within Volume 2: Elements. Arts, Culture, and Creativity. In “A General Plan for Nashville and Davidson County.”*

**Street Stalls**

**Overview**


One useful tactic to inform the public of a project, gain input from community members, and include local perspectives which may guide the project moving forward is through the use of street stalls. These stalls are set up outdoors and may consist of posters, maps, or conceptual drawings of a plan. Preferably, these stalls would be set up in a location where many people of the local community will see, and have a chance to, interact with. A community event, bustling downtown sidewalk, or popular shopping locale may
provide suitable options to reach a large number of people across an array of backgrounds. The idea is to engage with people by asking them their thoughts on what they can see in the display. This type of interaction can lead to new ideas and generate an understanding of how the public reacts toward the project. This technique can reach audiences who may not typically be inclined to participate. This approach creates an ease of access to the public and allows them to engage without being intimidated by a formal setting. It will enable users to freely speak their mind based on what information is being displayed. By being in a public environment, larger audiences can be engaged in this hands-on manner. However, this method also requires multiple people to be staffed at the street stall to handle the public. Large crowds could create the potential for too much input to be taken into account. Additional time is also required to set up a street stall and create the visuals. Additionally, you may need the approval to set up the street stall in certain areas.

**Appropriateness**

This technique is excellent for gathering data from a large number of people. It enables the engagement of people who may not be likely to attend more formal events. The casual nature of street stalls allows for open dialogue and an easy way to generate feedback.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>WEAKNESS</strong></th>
<th><strong>STRENGTHS</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Requires multiple people to be on staff</td>
<td>Allows users to speak their mind freely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much input could be gathered if crowds are large</td>
<td>Reach an array of audience, some of which may not be inclined to participate in a traditional sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time is needed to set up street stalls and any information or interactive exhibits</td>
<td>A large number of people can be engaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May require the approval to set up in certain areas / during events</td>
<td>Can generate new ideas</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can gauge public response to a potential project</td>
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**Case Study #1: North Fair Oaks Community Festival**

In Redwood City, California, the North Fair Oaks Community Festival typically draws a crowd of 35,000 people. Many of the festival goers are Latino, and most of them reside in immigrant or low income areas. The Hispanic Foundation of Silicon Valley decided to set up a booth, or street stall, at this festival so they could better engage with the local Latino population. The most engaging activity at the booth included a large printed tree with areas pertaining to the quality of life on each branch. The community members could talk to the facilitators, and their concerns would be written on an apple shaped paper and stuck to the corresponding branch. Through this exercise, it became clear that the community’s greatest needs are in education and housing.

This exercise allowed many members of the community to participate. Numerous respondents expressed their gratitude for being included in this manner. A broad audience
was able to be reached due to the public location of a community festival. Bilingual facilitators and handouts were provided to ease in connecting with a predominately Spanish speaking community. A free reusable bag with the organization’s logo was also given to those who participated in the quality of life engagement activity. These techniques made it possible for the organization to interact with many community members who typically would not have been reached. It allowed for trust to be built and voices to be heard. The organization now knows that the residents have concerns with affordable housing, and the educational system is essential to them so that their children will be prepared for the world.

**Case Study #2: Minneapolis 2040**

The most recent update to the city’s comprehensive plan is Minneapolis 2040. These relevant planning documents are essential for guiding a city through growth and change. Including community members is vital to the planning process. However, all too often, some groups are underrepresented. These groups typically include ethnic minority groups and those of lower socioeconomic status. One key part of the updated plan is to build relationships with these groups and ensuring their voices are heard and accounted for in the revised document. One way the staff can engage these groups is by setting up exhibits or booths at community events. In a large city like Minneapolis, there are multiple different festivals and events throughout the year that attract residents from all different backgrounds. Having access to these crowds allowed the city to give presentations, answer questions, and engage the residents through various interactive tools. By creating interactive ways to participate, the public feels much more included than attending a meeting where the primary goal is to spread information. The feedback and insight gained at these cultural events could then be analyzed and used to guide the 2040 plan. Creating an inclusive space, and connecting with the population in a meaningful way allows for relationships to be built and input to be provided. Interacting in public spaces creates an informal method of engagement that enables you to reach audiences who may not actively try and participate in the planning process.

**Collaborate**

Collaboration implies that an institution (being a government agency, a non for profit or a business) is working with residents and associations in partnership. Similar to involve, under this participatory strategy, still, the institution is the ultimate decision maker. Nonetheless, the institution tries to build consensus with other stakeholders. This means that they will dedicate time and finances to the effort, as consensus cannot be archived over a short period of time. Moreover, by trying to achieve consensus the institution is willing to give some, although not all, of their power to the community. Although the institution is the ultimate decision maker their credibility is a stake if they do not respect the achieved consensus, which might end up damaging its relationships with stakeholders. If on the other hand, the institution delivers on its promise to the public, the relationship might be strengthened.
Advisory Committee

Overview

An advisory committee is just one way to help with collaboration between various parties. An advisory committee is a group of people made up of individuals who bring past experiences and knowledge related to the goal or problem that is trying to be achieved or fixed within a community. They can also be called advisory boards, advisory councils, or even advisory groups. Usually, most committee members are elected or explicitly chosen to serve on the committee. Because of this, many committees decide to have a term length that states how long a member can be in place. This helps balance these committees so that one person or smaller group cannot overpower a group for a long time which could lead to not having people’s best interests in mind.

Part of the responsibility of an advisory committee is to make recommendations and give important info or materials to everyone they are serving for. These groups plan an essential role in public relations as they can serve as liaisons between the group and be advocates for these groups of people. The overall purpose of advisory committees is to help direct the goals and purpose of various groups working together. This means that an advisory group is a good idea any time large groups in the community may be affected by something. For example, an advisory group may be a good idea to involve when there is a chance for a gap in communication between the community and a governing group.

Like any technique or tool, and the advisory committee has strengths and weaknesses. Some weaknesses include that these groups can become the middleman between the community and other group(s) which may lead to little engagement between all parties, committee members may want some sort of incentive in return for their time and knowledge, these groups may need to meet regularly in order to be productive, and because these committees are generally much smaller than the overall population they may be representing or working with, they cannot always represent and voice everyone, only a majority.

Despite these weaknesses, though, advisory committees also have a lot of strengths. Advisory committees consist of members who are knowledgeable on the subjects at hand, they are often elected or put into position by those who they are representing and guiding, which makes them easier to trust; they tend to keep the various parties involved focused on the goal or purpose of the community needs; they may be more diverse of who makes up the panel; they help promote public relations; and many have limited term lengths as to provide a rotation of those who are a part of the advisory committee.

Appropriateness

Long term public input needs (regular meetings in perpetuity). Short term public input needs (meetings continue for a set period of time, usually until the stated goal is accomplished).
### Weaknesses

- Relatively small groups
- Elevates certain community voices above others
- Can be a significant time commitment
- “Citizen Committee” term itself may not be fully inclusive of immigrant community members

### Strengths

- Allows for non-government perspectives to be heard
- Can be restricted to people with certain qualifications
- Useful for both short and long term
- Creates a liaison between residents and government

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**Case Study #1: Graham Advisory Commission**

There are many examples, or case studies, on advisory committees. It seems that almost every community large or small has some official advisory committee, especially one dedicated to the planning of the town or city.

One example of an advisory committee in the Graham Advisory Commission. Graham is a small town in Pierce County, Washington. They consider themselves facilitators “between the County and community residents, property owners, and business owners regarding significant land use issues.” to allow for “two way communication.”

This committee reviews applications for various land use and developments and plans and at a public hearing give their input and advice and recommendations on the matter. Pierce County has many other advisory committees on their web page. This one pertains to planning, but they also have ones for accessible communities, developmental disabilities, and many other subjects (“Graham Advisory Commission | Pierce County, WA - Official Website,” 2019).

**Case Study #2: Advisory Committee in Little Chute, Wisconsin**

Another example of an advisory committee related to planning is the Strategic Planning Advisory Committee in Little Chute, Wisconsin. Little Chute is a small town with a population just over 11,400. The town was also established in 1848, so it is well established. In 2014, Little Chute created this advisory to help with the creation of a “strategic plan”, or “road map” of where the “Village is strategically headed over the next 5 years.” Little Chute wanted to make sure that they would be “preserving community character, enhancing the quality of life, and building a sustainable community for future generations through visionary leadership and citizen engagement.” From the beginning, Little Chute wanted to ensure the community had a voice. The advisory committee in Little Chute was one of the ways to achieve this goal. It is now five years later, and Little Chute seems to have met its goal. On the website, it mentions the advisory committee as “...an ad hoc committee. While there were a lot of meetings and discussions on the future of Little Chute, now that the plan is adopted, the real work begins.” This is an excellent example of how a community disbands or changes after the goal has been met (“2015—2019 Strategic Plan | Little Chute, WI - Official Website,” 2019).
Citizen’s Panel

Overview

Citizen’s panels can also be used for collaboration purposes as they are a way to engage community members through an ongoing panel. A citizen’s panel typically consists of 10 to 2,000 or more people who represent a community at large and its multifaceted character. Each panelist is surveyed one or more times per year to measure changes over time or a lack thereof. Citizen’s panels provide an opportunity for community members to voice their community’s assets, shortcomings and represent a range of opinions. Additionally, citizen’s panels allow people to participate in the public process without having to present ideas or physically show up to relevant meetings publicly. This opportunity appeals to those with disabilities, public anxiety, and other hindrances which commonly interfere with one’s engagement in the public process. Citizen’s panels, also referred to as consensus conferences, originated in the United States during a technological project in 1997 and has gained momentum since then and around the world.

Today, citizen’s panels are a tool which planners and policymakers alike can implement to objectively assess a community’s wants, needs, requirements, weaknesses, and strengths. There is a growing disparity between planners and communities, forcing a “us versus them” mentality; citizen’s panels are a feasible approach in community planning for combating this dualistic attitude. These panels are an encouraging way for many to get involved with an otherwise daunting community wide effort and an important opportunity for policy makers and planners to hear a variety of perspectives on a project as well as to measure its change over time.

Appropriateness

Although historically implemented in a variety of ways, appropriate use of a citizen’s panel, or consensus conference, is throughout a Comprehensive Plan. Comprehensive Plans typically measure a community’s strengths, weaknesses, and assets through market research, demographic analysis and often some form of community engagement. Implementing a citizen’s panel in a comprehensive planning process could ensure ongoing commitment, measured changes through different phases, and a well rounded panel to address each section in the Comprehensive Plan.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEAKNESS</th>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Having the same panelists may decrease new or creative insights</td>
<td>● Panels reflect a variety of voices in a community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Any turnover in panelists reduces the validity of measured changes</td>
<td>● Volunteer panelists increase public responsiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● If a panel isn’t balanced, one stakeholder’s voice may get stifled</td>
<td>● Provides a way for community members to voice opinions out of a public spotlight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Inadequate periodical surveying design may not allow for proper dialogue or response</td>
<td>● Annual changes can be measured through long term panelists through surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● The citizen’s panel process is fairly unregulated and hard to ensure its validity</td>
<td>● Turnover may lead to an ongoing or refreshed group of panelists</td>
</tr>
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**Case Study #1: Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services (2013)**

A common implementation of citizen’s panels is in the health industry and passing health policy. Beginning in 2013, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services (MEOHHS) designed a targeted approach for developing autism data collection. Early on in the process, MEOHHS sought public input for improving care, identifying funding sources and recipients, and coordinating information to patients. Jefferson Center is an organization which helps find solutions to challenges by purposefully engage with citizens, clients and stakeholders (“A Deliberative Approach to Develop Autism Data Collection in Massachusetts,” 2019). MEOHHS, with the help of Jefferson Center, developed a 19 member Citizen’s Panel to deliberate on autism related measures and policies up for debate. This panel was comprised of “people on the autism spectrum, parents of individuals with autism, and researchers” (“A Deliberative Approach to Develop Autism Data Collection in Massachusetts,” 2019). Panelists were recruited by open invitations and participated voluntarily throughout the two year panel and reporting process. This panel had set meetings and week long discussions, which led to a finalized report for state officials, including comments, questions, and policy recommendations. These recommendations and final report were later “presented to the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, and to the governor’s Autism Commission along with other state policy makers” (“A Deliberative Approach to Develop Autism Data Collection in Massachusetts,” 2019). This case study is a successful example of including key interest groups and community members who will directly be affected by policy and new protocol. This citizen’s panel is different than some because did not include a follow up survey process with panelists and instead developed a one off recommendations and final report to turn over to executive directors.
Case Study #2: Palo Alto, California Comprehensive Plan

Organizing and selecting a citizen’s panel is an often controversial and challenging task for lawmakers and planners. Palo Alto, California underwent a particularly difficult panelist appointment during their Comprehensive Plan update in 2006 through 2016. The panel was quickly comprised of 17 “former planning commissioners, avowed ‘residentialists,’ housing advocates and neighborhood representatives” (Sheyner, 2015). Many local and regional advocates argued that the citizen’s panel was geographically unbalanced and had members with conflicting interests, including active members of slow growth zoning organizations or members personally living on the controversial property (Sheyner, 2015). A group of citizens composed a letter which challenged the citizen’s panel, claiming it was “a direct conflict of interest” and needed a better “balance of people from north and south Palo Alto” (Sheyner, 2015). There is often underrepresentation of marginalized communities amidst affluent city leaders and selected representation on citizen’s panels. It is important to have an equitable variety of leaders and stakeholder’s aboard citizen’s panels; however, it is imperative to establish this early on in the planning process to avoid as much backlash and controversy as possible. Palo Alto’s updated Comprehensive Plan was a long run process and had the opportunity for amending the panel to represent a broader range of voices in the community. There is no way to ensure that volunteers of all relevant communities will want to participate in citizen’s panels, which often leads to an unbalanced panel. In this instance, Palo Alto’s 36 distinct neighborhoods were only partially represented during this planning process. Citizen’s panels are strictly voluntary and provide an opportunity for members of different communities to work together to have a sense of ownership on an otherwise exclusive public planning process.

Consensus Building

Overview

Consensus building is a community engagement strategy that enlists the input from an identified list of representatives from relevant stakeholder groups to solve complex problems spanning multiple issues. The approach is typically organized and conducted using a facilitator that guides the group towards reaching its ultimate goal of establishing consensus on a solution that works toward alleviating an identified community issue.
Consensus building typically follows a rough guideline of stages that makes up its process; good facilitation allows the approach to remain replicable and flexible, leaving space for group dynamics and problem solving mechanisms to evolve over time (Shereen, 2016).

The process can be expected to observe the following stages: identification of problem, establishment of community partnerships for participation, meeting and convening, process design, iterative problem definition and analysis, identification of solutions and potential variables or barriers to implementation, decision making, and agreement (consensus) (Burgess & Spangler, 2003) All stakeholders are allowed space to voice constituent concerns, values, and interests, and often use that information to redefine the problem to its locality. The facilitator helps participants understand that tradeoffs and cost benefit analyses may be necessary additions to the problem solving process to identify solutions that the entire group can agree on. The consensus building process is not considered complete until all parties have reached agreement on one approach that is appropriate and actionable for the issue at hand. After an agreement is reached, the solution is taken back to partner constituents for review and approval, with implementation to follow. An important final step of consensus building is monitoring the agreement and ensuring that compliance within implementation protocol is being followed, with an opportunity to regroup and work through obstacles or barriers encountered (Susskind, McKearnen, & Thomas-Lamar, 1999).

**Appropriateness**

Because consensus building is a complex, collaborative process that requires in person meeting and facilitation, it may be well suited as a policymaking tool within a city’s governmental civic engagement program. Proctoring consensus building through local government can help ensure that funding (and employee time) is available and that the process is appropriately incorporated as part of the civic engagement process for multiparty community issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Weaknesses</strong></th>
<th><strong>Strengths</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Time intensive</em></td>
<td><em>Increases quality of solutions as a result of comprehensive problem analysis and commitment to action</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential for Groupthink, or the desire to reach consensus without appropriately examining the solution, which can lead to poor ideas</td>
<td><em>All parties’ interests are voiced and protected through process and outcomes</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requires trust between parties; if little or no trust is present between stakeholders, the process falls apart</td>
<td><em>Decisions are more representative of the broader community</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants are usually granted only advisory, not decision making, power</td>
<td><em>Increases cooperation between adverse groups to strengthen relationships and overcome disparities</em></td>
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|                                                                 |                                                                 |
| *Creates a method for working on future problems***      | *                                                                 |

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Case Study #1: Community Visioning in Chattanooga, TN

Chattanooga is a mid-sized city in Tennessee whose local government has worked to involve the public in its planning and design process through participatory programming opportunities. In the early to mid-1990s, Chattanooga was experiencing a population boom, a turning point for the residents and policymakers alike. Fearful of a future filled with urban sprawl and traffic congestion, the city planners decided to open its doors to resident involvement during the planning process for its strategic goal setting document named Vision 2000. During this stage, Chattanooga’s planners recognized that strong and collaborative solutions could be reached using tools such as consensus building, which relied on trained, knowledgeable citizens and their ability to identify creative solutions to long term problems.

During the creation of Vision 2000, the City of Chattanooga had over 1,700 participants that contributed to and agreed upon over 40 community wide goals. ReVision, the City’s follow up iteration to the original document, increased participation further to 2,600 participants. The community engagement process was robust in three critical areas: involving leadership and grassroots organizations at every stage, education, and outreach to the community as new approaches emerged, and making the process as immersive as possible, inviting participants to engage with the City’s physical spaces in addition to working on policy decisions. The authors of this case study state that the most important stage of consensus building for this project was identifying and recruiting the correct stakeholders for participation in the engagement workshops; this strategy has been institutionalized in the City’s engagement strategy and continues to be used as a mechanism for policymaking and outreach.

Case Study #2: Wasatch Choice for 2040

Envision Utah, the smart growth coalition that works on regional planning along the Wasatch Front, helped develop Wasatch Choice for 2040, a long term transportation planning initiative that focuses on smart transportation in Utah’s fastest growing communities. Envision Utah began the planning process by performing intensive

1 Adapted from Case 11 (The Chattanooga Process, A City’s Vision is Realized) from The Consensus Building Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to Reaching Agreement.
background research to understand localized analyses and predictive modeling of land use and transportation trends, as well as understanding demographic factors such as health, economics, and transportation habits (“Confronting the Future: Case Studies in Regional Planning and Consensus-Building, HUD USER,” 2011). The coalition then used that data to identify key community stakeholder groups and their leaders, inviting them to participate in a series of roundtable discussions that resulted in outcome based decision making with consensus as to the lens.

Using a process of information, education, and collaboration, Envision Utah was able to distill the community’s needs into a regional plan that focused on transit oriented development in key areas that align with community values. An example outcome from this process was the agreed upon goal of increasing the percentage of housing and jobs located within high capacity transit, to 11 and 20 percent, respectively (“Envision Utah—About Wasatch Choice 2040,” 2011). Strong facilitation and frequent opportunities for meeting made the consensus building engagement process possible for a wide variety of stakeholders and citizen policymakers to participate.

**Empower**

Empowerment is the ultimate form of citizen control. Citizens are making the decisions that will affect their future. This could be achieved in many ways. For instance, voting. In 2018 three citizen initiated measures were certified for the ballot in Utah to: (1) legalize marihuana, (2) expand Medicare and, (3) establish an independent commission to recommend maps for redistricting to the state legislature.

But voting is not the only way of achieving empowerment. The Planning Division relies on the Planning Commission, which is composed of citizens who can vote and make legislative and administrative decisions about a variety of plans. There are other examples that will be discussed here like citizens committees, neighborhood associations.
Citizen Committees

Overview

Citizen committees are one way to allow for community empowerment in a way that is manageable for governments. Creation of a citizen committee generally involves establishing a board of citizens appointed by government officials to advise the city on essential matters. Some established citizen committees may also have the power to appoint new members when a seat is vacated. Committee members may be required to have certain qualifications in order to be considered for appointment; this ensures that the committee is fully capable of carrying out its duties in an informed way. When appointing committee members, it is crucial to make sure a diverse range of perspectives are represented by those selected to be members.

Salt Lake City provides several good examples of citizen committees, including its Bicycle Advisory Committee. As the name suggests, this committee is tasked with reviewing projects and issues of interest to people who bike in the city (“Bicycle Advisory Committee,” 2019). Committee membership is restricted to people who live, work, or attend school within Salt Lake City. Committee members must also be interested in promoting bicycling, represent a variety of bicycling interests, and have excellent interpersonal skills. The committee members meet once a month in perpetuity to work on bicycle related issues for the city.

Many cities and towns also make use of temporary citizen committees. For example, the City of St. Louis in 2017 established the Citizen Advisory Committee to identify finalists for the position of a city police commissioner (City of St. Louis, 2019). The use of a citizen committee, in this case, helped to make sure the selection of the new police commissioner involved substantial participation by non-government affiliated residents.

Appropriateness

Citizen committees are appropriate tools to use when community input on a specific topic is desired in regular intervals over a long period of time (e.g., Bicycle Advisory Committee in Salt Lake City). Citizen committees can be useful for temporary input needs as well, particularly when making decisions of great interest and importance to the general public (e.g., Citizen Advisory Board selecting finalists for police commissioner position in St. Louis).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEAKNESS</th>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Typically, small groups</td>
<td>• Allows for non-government perspectives to be heard</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Elevates certain community voices above</td>
<td>• Membership can be restricted to people with specific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>others</td>
<td>qualifications or experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Significant time commitment</td>
<td>• Useful for both short and long term</td>
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<tr>
<td>• “Citizen committee” term itself can be</td>
<td>• Creates a link between residents and government</td>
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<tr>
<td>interpreted as restrictive to noncitizen</td>
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<td>immigrants</td>
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**Case Study #1: Citizens’ Advisory Committee, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning**

Transportation is an issue of great importance in any city, as everybody needs to be able to transport themselves between their homes, workplaces, schools, places of worship, and other destinations. Planning transportation systems at the metropolitan level is handled by metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) that work with municipalities within their defined service areas to coordinate regional transportation. Chicago’s MPO, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), has opted to use a citizen committee as part of their long range transportation planning efforts.

CMAP has established the Citizens’ Advisory Committee to primarily represent community interests the Chicago area’s long range transportation plans (CMAP). The committee is tasked with (1) promoting public awareness of CMAP plans, (2) assisting in dissemination of public information, (3) providing continuous and balanced representation of the Chicago metro area community, (4) provide CMAP officials with residents’ perspectives, and e) act in various ways as intermediaries between CMAP and the general community (CMAP). The committee meets quarterly to address the latest developments and ideas for transportation in Chicago. Meetings are also open to the general public.

The Citizens’ Advisory Committee has been instrumental in offering key community input in Chicago area transportation planning. The committee provides feedback on topics ranging from roadway improvements to strategies for reinvesting in disinvested areas (CMAP). Without the input from the Citizens’ Advisory Committee, CMAP may have faced higher challenges in maintaining public support for its projects and proposals. The Citizens’ Advisory Committee has allowed for extensive community input and has also allowed for CMAP to get information out to the general public in a unique way.

**Case Study #2: Citizen Advisory Committee, City of St. Louis**

The City of St. Louis has struggled in recent years with both high crime and high distrust of its police department. Suspicion is often particularly high among members of the city’s
black community, especially in the wake of the 2014 police shooting of Michael Brown just a few miles away in Ferguson, MO. In 2017 the city took an opportunity to utilize public involvement in the hiring of a new police commissioner.

The mayor’s office established the Citizen Advisory Committee in 2017 to aid the city in selecting the new police commissioner. The committee was comprised of 13 people who represented diverse perspectives from around St. Louis (City of St. Louis, 2019). The committee met regularly between June and December 2017 to evaluate applicants for the police commissioner position, and the city published records of each meeting online. The committee was able to shape the selection process from the beginning as well. Ultimately, the committee submitted a list of six finalists, which the mayor subsequently used to make a final hiring decision (City of St. Louis, 2019).

Recognizing the importance of safety and security to the success and vibrancy of city communities, the City of St. Louis, in this case, made a significant effort to ensure that the new leader of its police department would have the support of the wider community. In the context of St. Louis, this decision was key to legitimizing the selection process to the general public and addressing the tensions between citizens and police. Allowing a citizen committee to be heavily involved in the selection process has not solved the issue of public distrust, but it did mark a significant step toward a more community oriented policing model in St. Louis.

Neighborhood Associations

Overview

Neighborhood Associations are a group of community residents who meet together to accomplish specific goals. Neighborhood Associations can be comprised of homeowners, renters, religious leaders, school faculty, business owners, and more. Meetings can be held as often as once a month, or as infrequently as twice a year depending on the goals of the group. Neighborhood Associations are an essential part of planning because the residents are the people who ultimately know what is best for their neighborhood. These people are the ones that live in the area and have a vested interest in what happens. Something that worked well in one neighborhood may not necessarily translate the same way in another. By having a neighborhood association, citizens can identify challenges and concerns within their community, discuss improvements they would like to see, and
represent their neighborhood and their interests to their elected officials. While Neighborhood Associations may only come together to discuss areas of concerns that need to be improved upon, they can be even more effective when they meet on a regular basis, they discuss what is transpiring in their city and improve their effectiveness. Not only does meeting together help them discuss ideas and ways they can improve their communities, but it also allows residents to build stronger relationships with one another. Neighborhood Associations can facilitate an opportunity so that various people in the city, regardless of their background, ethnicity, etc. can meet together and discuss shared goals and visions.

Neighborhood Associations are a crucial part of the planning process and need to be utilized. Neighborhood Associations are appropriate to use for any occasion where local government and elected officials would like to receive input from the citizens. This specific kind of organization has several different strengths that reaffirm its importance as part of the planning process. One advantage is that it really does help citizens build relationships with each other. In today’s world it is so easy to watch the world through social media and really never want to leave our houses other than to go to work or other basic functions. Neighborhood Associations get people motivated about issues and ideas for improvement within the community that gets all kinds of people involved. Not only that, but Neighborhood Associations can be an excellent resource for citizens. Sometimes it can be challenging to find out information from local government leaders as a resident or even know where to start on a specific topic. It can be much easier to find a Neighborhood Associations that has goals and agendas similar to topics that are of interest to the citizen and it provides an easier welcome into the world of planning. Along with that idea, these kinds of Associations provide the opportunity for residents to get together and to come up with ideas. After they have narrowed it down, it makes it clearer for them to then share these ideas with elected officials. One of the last strengths that Neighborhood Associations have is that when citizens are involved in planning, then more often they start to gain a kind of ownership or stewardship over projects as they feel that they were directly involved and so they are more connected with these solutions.

Some weaknesses come with Neighborhood Associations. As with anything, when there is someone that needs to be in charge and take leadership, there can be a fear of it becoming self-promoting. A leader can derail the Association and sometimes turn it into their soapbox. Not to mention, when trying to get people involved in planning, planners strive to make this as easy as possible. Membership in a Neighborhood Association can be time consuming among all the other pressing responsibilities that citizens have. While some would like to think that Neighborhood Associations are a great tool for connecting with the community, there is always a chance that it is not an accurate representation of the thoughts and ideas of the whole. Instances occur where the Neighborhood Association is just a very vocal minority, and the majority of the peoples’ opinions aren’t being heard.
Appropriateness

Neighborhood associations will only work within the boundaries of a neighborhood. There must be support from the majority on the neighborhood.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEAKNESS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Can be turned into self promoting/political agenda/soapbox</td>
<td>● Helps residents build relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● People can still have a fear of speaking out or engaging with other people</td>
<td>● Effective resources for the citizens in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Time consuming</td>
<td>● The organization can help residents succinctly share opinions with elected officials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● It may not be accurate representation of the community as a whole, but just representation of a certain group of people (vocal minority)</td>
<td>● Citizens take ownership in projects within their community</td>
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Case Study #1: Logan Square Neighborhood Association

The first case study that I studied was one that happened in a Chicago neighborhood. This case study was an excellent example of how local government working together with a neighborhood association. The Chicago Public Schools (CPS) had been looking for ways and projects that would improve many of the schools in Chicago neighborhoods. After researching for community partners, they found the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LNSA)—a not for profit organization that had similar goals related to education, specifically how strong neighborhoods need strong schools. LNSA had three main goals: (1) make schools centers of community life through Community Learning Centers, (2) develop school/community partnerships with parents as leaders and, (3) develop the Parent Teacher Mentor Program to help parents develop their skills, assist teachers, and build strong relationships in the community. While the change the local government was trying to enact did not happen overnight, as a result of their partnership with neighbors through LNSA community organizers CPS has been able to make substantial headway with their goals. CPS learned that by finding community partners with similar goals, they are able to achieve goals that otherwise would not have been possible. And, this is one of the advantages of partnership. At the same time this example is discussed here and not under collaboration because CPS have control to LNSA. Community organizers at LNSA were able to make decisions on their own and CPS supported those decisions.

Case Study #2: Minneapolis’ Neighborhood Revitalization Program

The second case study presented here is the Minneapolis’ Neighborhood Revitalization Program. Bob Miller, the planning director at the time, said, “We received a wake up call from a homeowner survey that showed that 20 percent of the current homeowners planned to move out of the city within five years.” At the time, the local government had
been working to revitalize the city’s downtown area. However, when they conducted this survey and reached out for more citizen involvement, they realized that maybe they hadn’t been focusing on the right thing. Now, with all tools of community engagement there are pros and cons. It is very difficult to get an accurate representation of an area at any given time. Often times, it can be very difficult for planners to get minority groups and underrepresented individuals involved in the planning process. Like this case study showed, multiple different resources need to be tapped into in order to get a more holistic view of what the community needs. After receiving the survey of homeowners, local planning leaders then made an effort to reach out and truly partnership with a couple of the neighborhood associations within their area. After doing so, they were able to focus on things that the residents actually wanted and lead to a greater and more effective relationship between the people and local government.

![Figure 19. Parents at CPS school working with LNSA community organizers. Source: LNSA. Pearl District Neighborhood Association Logo. Source: Pearl District Neighborhood Association.](image)

**Identify stakeholders**

To create a robust participatory experience, planners and community engagement facilitators need to connect to a wide range of relevant stakeholders and partners. Identifying stakeholders will include developing an understanding of the potentially affected community base, including local agencies and organizations, demographics, and other local amenities such as businesses and schools. When contacting these relevant stakeholder groups, it is important that the planner reaches out to trusted community leaders that come from a range of diversity; this often means that stakeholders have varying ages, racial and ethnic backgrounds, religious beliefs, socioeconomic status, and so on.

One technique that a planner or facilitator can use to reach a wide range of stakeholders is network creation. Starting with a small group of known trusted community leaders, the planner can then ask that those leaders in turn reach out to their community partners for feedback on who else needs to be included in the process. This strategy may be referred to as the “snowball” method (García et al., 2019); the community engagement experience is strengthened as an accurate representation, through public participation, of impacted populations is reached. However, it is also vital for the planner to acknowledge gaps in community representation and regularly reassess needs to appropriately broaden the stakeholder network (Public Health Foundation, 2010).
Overcoming barriers to inclusiveness

In order to allow numerous and diverse population to engage in the planning process, especially at demographically underrepresented cities, the city’s government and planning agency should get knowledge of the barriers they would face during the decision making process shared with community residents. Sometimes barriers can be classified into materialistic and non-materialistic. In term of materialistic factors, some examples can be seen as accessible transportation’s shortage, distinctive daily work schedules, and so on. In terms of non-materialistic factors some example of barriers can be seen as mutual mistrust among residents, language ability level’s variance, racial cultural difference among community, various gaps among community in term of literacy level, knowledge gap among community in terms of educational background, distinction in terms of income from different social stratums and so on.

When planners try to classify various specific types of barriers in a proper manner, they will then move forward to figure out reasonable solutions to overcoming these challenging barriers eventually. For example, for public transportation’ issue, it can be feasible to build up a regularly operating traffic line and assign some free carpool pick up various working schedule issues, the planning organization should send an email early and use a questionnaire to get the most available coordinated meeting time for most people. For knowledge gap’s issue among community residents, some regular and educational lectures and online course tutorials can be held in order to pass essential knowledge to these residents to narrow the gap in term of literacy level among those diverse groups of community members.

Limitations

There are many potential limitations to engaging a diverse community that will present themselves within the context of planning. While this is a critical aspect to consider, as it is an inevitable part of the process, there are ways to mitigate and resolve planning limitations. The context of this portion of the engagement process will illuminate frequent and recurring limitations to engagement, as well as outline a technique that seeks to mitigate and resolve said limitations.

The limitations briefly covered within this outline include the following: (1) lack of clarity or understanding, (2) lack of transparency and, (3) a lack of inclusivity (García et al., 2019). While the three aforementioned limitations are often the main inhibitors of progression in any planning project, they are not insurmountable.

When there is a lack of clarity or understanding, this is often due to inadequate information provided to the community, or as a result of the usage of technical jargon that is only applicable to a specific audience (García et al., 2019). When there is a lack of transparency, this is often as a result of subjective perceptions of what is being presented, such as the planner is not perceived as being honest or forthcoming; that some vital piece of information is being withheld from the community. When there is a lack of inclusivity, community members often feel isolated, underrepresented, and generally voiceless. This is often due to scheduling issues, issues of bias and discrimination, planners not making
connections with diverse community members for various reasons, different modes of communication, etc.

While these three limitations mentioned are not the only limitations encountered, they are found to be the most commonly occurring (Community Places, 2014). A planner needs to evaluate how he or she is engaging community by talking to community partners and see if they find the process being clear, transparent and inclusive.

**Planning for next steps**

It is a crucial part of the planning process to be timely with citizen feedback and to keep residents informed of the next steps and overall flow of the project. Citizens are more likely to engage in the planning process when they feel as though their ideas and thoughts have been heard and taken into consideration. Communication regarding how their participation influenced or changed the overall project outcome reinforces continued engagement throughout the process. Participants at any point in the engagement process should be informed of how they can change and shape the next steps of the project, and be invited to do so. The ensures that the planners and people brought in from the outside are doing what the community wants. In addition, citizens should be informed as to when and how decisions will be taken, whether or not they can be involved in the implementation stage of the process, and further opportunities for engagement.
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Community Engagement Techniques

https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/