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PLANNING FOR STRONGER LOCAL DEMOCRACY



A Field Guide for Local Officials

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FOREWORD

Making democracy work and making government work have been core values and central tasks of many American cities and for the National League of Cities (NLC). Governance, however, is changing. Local leaders are well aware that citizens desire to play more active roles in determining budget priorities, addressing issues and planning long-term sustainability for their communities.

We are pleased to introduce, *Planning for Stronger Local Democracy: A Field Guide for Local Officials*. This hands-on guide lays out key questions for local governments to use to assess their community's engagement capacities. Also included are practical suggestions to finding out when and how to develop and enhance public participation practices.

This guide draws from the lessons learned from NLC's many years of promoting more involvement among local officials, citizens and key allies in the community. Included are models of practices from pioneering local officials, their staff and democratic governance practitioners from around the country.

Every community is unique, and the assessment and adjustments for sustaining a healthy and wholesome community engagement infrastructure will be different. However, what we have learned is that the more networks and representatives from all facets of the community that are invited into the mix, the greater the benefit to the overall communities' well being.

NLC has also learned that engagement itself has an impact on local economic vitality. A number of recent studies have shown a correlation between how people feel about their community and levels of economic growth in that city.

This guide will assist local officials to cultivate a culture with their citizens and key allies that is transparent and inclusive with shared responsibilities and mutual accountability for addressing and solving problems to strengthen local democracy.

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The National League of Cities is the nation's oldest and largest organization devoted to strengthening and promoting cities as centers of opportunity, leadership and governance. NLC is a resource and advocate for more than 1,600 member cities and the 49 state municipal leagues, representing 19,000 cities and towns and more than 218 million Americans.

Through its Center for Research and Innovation, NLC provides research and analysis on key topics and trends important to cities, creative solutions to improve quality of life in communities, inspiration and ideas for local officials to use in tackling tough issues, and opportunities for city leaders to connect with peers, share experiences and learn about innovative approaches in cities. Center for Research and Innovation projects include Democratic Governance.

DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

NLC has many years of experience working in the field of democratic governance. NLC has used its unique position to employ effective techniques to encourage and enable city officials in dialogue and inquiry around various forms of civic engagement, consensus building, collaboration and participatory practices.

NLC established a City Futures Panel on Democratic Governance to support members seeking to engage citizens more effectively in responding to their cities' most daunting challenges and promising opportunities. Democratic Governance is an area that can serve to foster communication and collaboration across all areas of local governance — budgets and finance, race and human relations, transportation and infrastructure, community and economic development and education. By exploring, understanding and articulating this inter-connectedness, democratic strategies can help local officials strengthen the position of cities as centers of opportunity, leadership and governance.

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ABOUT THE DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY CONSORTIUM (DDC)

The Deliberative Democracy Consortium (DDC) is an alliance of the major organizations and leading scholars working in the field of deliberation and public engagement. The DDC represents more than 50 foundations, nonprofit organizations, and universities, collaborating to support research activities and advance democratic practice, in North America and around the world.

Matt Leighninger is the Executive Director of the DDC. Over the last sixteen years, Matt has worked with public engagement efforts in over 100 communities, in 40 states and four Canadian provinces.

Matt is a Senior Associate for Everyday Democracy, and serves on the boards of E-Democracy.Org, the National School Public Relations Association, and The Democracy Imperative. He has also been a consultant to the National League of Cities, NeighborWorks America, Centers for Disease Control, and the League of Women Voters. His first book, *The Next Form of Democracy: How Expert Rule is Giving Way to Shared Governance – and Why Politics Will Never Be the Same*, traces the recent shifts in the relationship between citizens and government, and examines how these trends are reshaping our democracy.

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PART ONE

Key Questions to Ask about How to Engage the Public



Introduction

Key Questions to Ask about How to Engage the Public

Local officials seem to have reached a critical threshold in their work to strengthen local democracy. Reacting to a combination of factors, local governments are exploring ways to move from temporary public engagement efforts to more stable, durable foundations for democratic governance. NLC defines democratic governance as “the art of governing a community in participatory, inclusive, deliberative, and collaborative ways.” Key Questions to Ask About How to Engage the Public lays out some of the key questions you might ask about democratic governance in your city – questions that will help you decide how to create a much stronger, more productive long-term relationship between citizens, local government and other organizations in the community.

For some time, local officials have been faced with a kind of ‘Catch-22’ dilemma: public trust in government has declined steadily, while the active support and engagement of citizens has become increasingly critical for solving public problems. Today’s citizens are simply more vocal, knowledgeable, diverse, skilled and skeptical than the citizens of a generation ago. There are a number of macro-level trends at work here – rising levels of education, different attitudes toward authority, the emergence of the Internet – but it all adds up to a basic shift in what citizens expect, and what they can contribute. “As a public servant, I need to understand what people want and need,” says Rodney Locks, a Councilmember in Brevard, North Carolina. “It’s not the city’s agenda that we’re promoting – it’s the people’s agenda.”

To address these new expectations, and take advantage of new citizen capacities, local officials have developed more proactive, intensive forms of public engagement. (This work has many labels: in addition to “democratic governance” and “public engagement,” “citizen involvement,” “public participation,” and other terms are used to describe it. These efforts have mobilized large numbers of people to take part in public decision-making and problem-solving. In order to engage a diverse critical mass of citizens, local leaders have employed targeted, network-based recruitment. In order to ensure that the meetings are productive, they have employed group process techniques like impartial facilitation, small-group discussions, and guides or agendas that lay out a range of policy options. In some cases, they have inspired and supported citizens to give their own time and effort to community improvements, in addition to making recommendations for the city to implement.

These democratic governance initiatives – even the most successful ones – also have some key limitations. They have primarily been temporary, and limited to a particular issue, plan or policy question. Because they are usually focused on city-level decision-making, they do not necessarily have an impact at the neighborhood or regional levels. So while they have proliferated dramatically, and have often had many beneficial outcomes, in most cases they do not seem to have produced long-term changes in the way that communities operate.

Meanwhile, in just the last few years, cities have been buffeted by a number of shifts that affect how local officials interact with the public. The recent recession has plunged many cities into fiscal crisis, and prompted local officials to engage citizens in thorny questions about how to balance revenues and services. At the same time, cities are sharing more local government data with citizens, who are better able to use and assess the information. Finally, the explosion of social media has meant that citizens have new venues to connect around their concerns and articulate their views about local politics. These pressures present new challenges, but also new opportunities.

Local officials are starting to think more seriously about how to combine hard-earned engagement lessons with innovations. They are reaching out to other leaders and organizations and trying to develop more productive, dynamic and long-term strategies and structures for democratic governance. The “Spectrum of public engagement” lists the main kinds of engagement activities now going on in cities today, in the form of a spectrum that ranges from the most basic (circulating information) to the most advanced (deciding and acting).

There are fourteen questions that local officials and municipal staff should consider in order to begin laying stronger foundations for local democracy:

1. There are many types and levels of public engagement – do you have a process for deciding which approach to use when?
2. How effective are your public meetings and other official interactions between citizens and local government?
3. How well do your key allies reflect and represent the full diversity of the community?
4. How well are neighborhood associations and other grassroots groups serving their neighborhoods?
5. Are there segments of the community that have historically been ignored or excluded?
6. In what ways are recent immigrants connected, or disconnected, from the rest of the community?
7. How well are you supporting young leaders and tapping into their potential?
8. Have there been any deliberative public engagement initiatives, led by local government or by other organizations, recently in your city?
9. How are you and your citizens using social media to connect with neighbors, solve problems and discuss local issues?
10. Is local government data available online and how effectively does it complement and inform public engagement?
11. How much is the city spending – and saving – on public engagement annually?
12. How are engagement activities and initiatives evaluated and assessed?
13. What are the legal mandates and restrictions on how you interact with the public?
14. Do local officials and city employees have the skills, cultural awareness and organizational support to work productively with citizens?

This is a comprehensive set of questions – and more may emerge as you take stock of the strengths and weaknesses of your local democracy. But not all of them may apply to your community; some can be answered easily, while others may deserve a closer look, including research that is more intensive. This guide is designed to help you make those choices, and give you suggestions about how to delve further on the questions that offer the greatest opportunity for understanding and innovation.

Each assessment question provides in-depth information, additional questions to ask, further actions to consider, and in some cases, a city practice example.

You are probably not the only leader in your city who is asking these questions. In most places, a wide range of leaders and organizations are dealing with new citizen expectations and capacities, and trying to find ways to engage people productively in decision-making and problem-solving. People working in foundations, school systems, universities, neighborhood associations, civic groups, service clubs, county governments and other organizations may be partners for you in your efforts to improve local democracy. Many of the bulleted “Potential next steps” listed throughout the guide suggest key allies you might work with on a particular question.

Using your findings to help develop a long-term democratic governance plan

Answering some of the questions posed in this guide can help you gain a greater understanding of your city and your role as an elected official. The knowledge you gain can also be helpful for developing a more sustainable, broadly supported, long-term plan for strengthening democratic governance. The Public Engagement Infrastructure Guide will lay out more specific suggestions for beginning your planning process.

One way to prepare for this shared planning is by asking what kinds of “civic assets” the community possesses. A civic asset could be any kind of resource – a building, an organization, a program – that connects citizens to one another, and to their public institutions, in ways that inspire and support collaboration, deliberation, and shared responsibility. Different cities have different combinations of assets and will likely come up with their own unique recipes for stronger local democracy. Here are some potential assets to consider:

- A city-wide commission to promote, guide and advise public engagement on all issues
- Wired, welcoming physical spaces – schools, libraries, community centers – that can serve as hubs for local democracy
- Mini-grant programs for neighborhood improvement projects, requiring matching contributions of sweat equity, materials and other donations from residents and neighborhood organizations
- Community events that combine socializing and problem-solving
- Neighborhood councils that receive staff support or funding, and have an official role in policymaking and a central role in community-building

One effect of listing your city’s civic assets, and considering the questions in this guide, may be that your picture of democratic governance becomes larger and more complex. How citizens and government interact is only one part of that picture: healthy local democracy requires a variety of supportive organizations, a connected array of local leaders and a range of opportunities for citizens to contribute.

Key Questions to Ask about How to Engage the Public

It is important, therefore, for a number of local leaders to be asking questions and making plans together. City Hall can play a key role in improving and sustaining local democracy, but it cannot bear the whole burden. A strong, healthy local democracy is something that benefits every community member, every organization, and every local leader.

“Sometimes you need a meeting that is also a party,” says Gloria Rubio-Cortés of the National Civic League, “and sometimes you need a party that is also a meeting.”

MORE POTENTIAL CIVIC ASSETS

- Schools
- Business community
- Faith community
- Hospitals
- Libraries
- Community foundations
- Youth groups
- Community centers
- Groups promoting racial equity
- Immigrant service organizations
- Civic groups
- Service clubs
- Neighborhood groups
- Colleges and universities
- Newspapers
- Radio and TV stations
- Public access television
- New online media
- Community organizing groups
- Police and fire departments

There are many types and levels of public engagement. Do you have a process for deciding which approach to use when?

Key Questions to Ask about How to Engage the Public **QUESTION 1 OF 14**



The engagement activities described in this guide are some of the most common examples of how citizens and government interact. They are part of a broad spectrum of engagement work (see Spectrum of Public Engagement Activities chart).

Different activities are helpful for different reasons, and they tend to rely on and complement one another. Some are more difficult and time-intensive to organize than others. Local officials who are experienced in democratic governance point out the importance of being strategic about these choices. “It isn’t practical to engage citizens in every public decision or problem – nor would citizens want to be engaged in everything,” says Robin Beltramini, a city councilmember in Troy, Michigan. “But if you’re not engaging them proactively and intensively in at least some decisions, you’re probably not doing enough.”

Taking Stock, Picking Tools

Portland, Oregon (pop. 566,000)
Contact: Office of Neighborhood Involvement,
(508) 823-4519, <http://www.portlandonline.com/oni/>

The City of Portland has a strong and varied public engagement system, including neighborhood district offices, a mini-grant program, advisory councils, a best practices recognition program and formal ties with organizations representing ‘under-engaged’ groups. The City uses a set of public involvement principles to guide local officials and staff in their engagement work:

- Partnership
- Early involvement
- Building Relationships and Community Capacity
- Inclusiveness and Equity
- Good Quality Process Design and Implementation
- Transparency
- Accountability

The City also uses a Public Involvement Toolkit that helps city employees and citizens decide what kind of engagement approach to use in a given situation. The Toolkit uses a set of assessment questions and a scorecard to help people find the tools they need.

Food for Thought and Engagement

DeSoto, Texas (pop. 48,200)
Contact: Kathy Maples Jones, 972-230-9648 or
kathy.jones@ci.desoto.tx.us

“DeSoto, Dining and Dialogue” (DDD) is a volunteer-run nonprofit organization that brings people from different cultural backgrounds together over dinner to discuss community issues. Three times a year, restaurants, churches and families open their doors to 8 to 10 of their fellow residents. Each of the host groups donates its own time, energy and food to the event. The most recent dinner, in 2010, included 120 people. Each Dialogue is run by a trained facilitator who leads the group in a series of prepared discussion questions. The City of DeSoto backs this initiative in a number of ways. A city employee provides administrative support. The Council provides \$5,000 to the DDD out of the city’s general fund. The city also markets the program on the city website, and promotes upcoming dinners at City Council meetings. The Mayor is an active participant in DDD, which was one of the cornerstone programs that qualified DeSoto to be chosen for the National Civic League’s All-America City Award in 2006.

MORE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT HOW YOU MAKE STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT DECISIONS:

- Which of the activities listed in the “Spectrum of Public Engagement Activities” chart have been used in your city?
- How effective are these various tools and strategies at reaching a broad range of residents?
- How does your community set goals for public engagement, and make decisions about what kinds of activities will fit their goals?
- Within local government, is there a formal or informal process by which public officials and employees make these decisions?

POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS:

- Use the chart to list and categorize the different kinds of engagement activities that occur in your city.
- Work with an academic researcher, an independent scholar or some other ally to create a short history of recent attempts to engage the public. For an example, see “From Neighborhood Association System to Participatory Democracy – Broadening and Deepening Public Involvement in Portland, Oregon” (See Appendix).

What is a citizen?

The word “citizen” has a rich history in American democracy. However, it can also be a confusing word to use. Sometimes it is defined in a narrow, legal way, meaning only those people who hold U.S. passports or are eligible to vote. In this guide, “citizen” is used to mean “resident,” or “person.”

Spectrum of Public Engagement Activities*

* Adapted from a previous spectrum developed by the International Association for Public Participation

TYPE OF ENGAGEMENT	CIRCULATING INFORMATION	DISCUSSING AND CONNECTING	GATHERING INITIAL INPUT	DELIBERATING AND RECOMMENDING	DECIDING AND ACTING
<p><i>what is happening</i></p> <p>Local governments, nonprofits, civic organizations, the media, and citizens themselves are making information available about key public issues. Some of this is raw data, provided in ways that make it easy to use and analyze. Some cities also use “citizen’s academies” to give people a much closer look at how government works.</p>	<p>Citizens, local officials, city staff, and other stakeholders get regular opportunities to build relationships, discuss issues, and celebrate community.</p>	<p>Local governments, other organizations, the media, or citizens themselves reach out to gauge immediate public opinion on a particular issue or question.</p>	<p>Local governments, other organizations, the media, or citizens themselves recruit a wide range of people to address a public issue or decision. The sessions follow good group process guidelines. The participants talk about why the issue matters to them, consider a range of policy options, and make recommendations about what they think should be done.</p>	<p>Local officials and other decision-makers are making policy decisions, developing a plan, or creating a budget based (at least in part) on what they have heard from citizens and other stakeholders. Local officials, city staff, other organizations, and citizens themselves are taking action in a variety of ways to address key issues and opportunities.</p>	
<p><i>how it is happening</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • online • media coverage • public meetings • citizen’s academies • online land use visualization tools • serious games 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • public meetings • block parties • festivals • workshops • online forums 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • surveys • polls • focus groups • listening sessions • public hearings • online crowd sourcing • Geographic Info. Systems (GIS) • online budget simulators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • small face-to-face discussions • online deliberations • large action forums or town hall meetings • deliberations that occur as part of existing meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • individual volunteer activities • action teams and committees • changes made by organizations • policy decisions • strategic plans • comp plans • budgets 	

How effective are your public meetings and other official interactions between citizens and local government?

Key Questions to Ask about How to Engage the Public **QUESTION 2 OF 14**



Cities typically hold a range of meetings to conduct public business. Some are regular monthly proceedings, such as city council and school board meetings, in which the main focus is on decision-making by city officials, with time set aside for comments from the public. Others are events like public hearings and listening sessions in which the focus is on communicating with citizens. Local governments generally do not conduct proactive recruitment for these meetings; citizens find out about them through the local newspaper, by visiting the city web-site or by word of mouth.

In some places, these meetings are a source of frustration for both officials and the public. To local officials, the public seems either angry or absent; most of the time, turnout by citizens is low, and seldom reflects the full diversity of the community. (Officials often refer to the people who regularly attend as “the usual suspects.”) But when a controversial issue or decision on the table, turnout can be very high, with large numbers of frustrated residents. In those cases, the format of a discussion among officials only, followed by an ‘open microphone’ period in which each presenter has an allotted (usually three-minute) time to make comments, seems to ratchet up the level of tension and the potential for conflict.

Local officials often talk more positively about their informal interactions with citizens. Usually these are one-on-one or

small-group conversations in City Hall, in the grocery store, in schools or in other common community settings. “You can’t govern from city hall alone,” says Mike Gibson, Mayor Pro Tem of Carson, California. “I learn a great deal in the local barbershop – that’s where you can find out what people are really thinking and talking about.” Though they have different goals, it may be helpful to compare the main characteristics of these more informal conversations with the features of official public meetings.

Allies on Campus

Academic researchers are increasingly interested in public engagement and participation, and may represent an important resource for local officials. In some cities, college and university professors have worked with local governments on process design, survey design and compilation, the use of online tools, and evaluation of participation activities. Departments of public administration, political science, and communications may be the most likely places to look for potential allies, but professors in other disciplines may also be helpful; consult national academic networks like the Democracy Imperative and the Deliberative Democracy Consortium.

MORE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT PUBLIC MEETINGS:

- What kinds of official public meetings go on regularly in your city?
- How is recruitment or notification conducted for these meetings?
- What is the typical format for these meetings? Have any official bodies – city council, school board, planning board, human relations commission – experimented with different formats?
- Are you satisfied with the effectiveness of official public meetings? How well do these meetings build trust and help officials make good policy decisions?
- Do you get the sense that the citizens who attend are satisfied with official public meetings?
- Do you meet regularly with citizens in more informal settings? How would you characterize those conversations? How does your experience in those discussions differ from official public proceedings?

POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS:

- Use a survey to gauge citizens' attitudes toward official public meetings. Do people feel like their voices are heard? Do the meetings build trust? Do citizens think that they lead to better policy decisions?
- Consult NLC's *Beyond Civility: From Public Engagement to Problem Solving* (see Appendix).
- Work with local academic researchers on a survey, focus group, or other research methods that will assess the attitudes of citizens, local officials and city staff toward official public meetings.

How well do your key allies reflect and represent the full diversity of the community?

Key Questions to Ask about How to Engage the Public **QUESTION 3 OF 14**



Local officials typically rely on a range of people who help them understand the needs and concerns of the larger community. They are also approached, on a regular basis, by people and organizations who claim to represent a larger group of residents, a particular interest group or some other segment of the population. It is not always clear how effectively or authentically these various stakeholders represent their constituencies, or how well they serve as a conduit between public officials and the public.

There are several aspects to this challenge. First, if the people advising you are not as diverse (in terms of race, gender, age and class) as the community, the input they give you will not reflect the needs and interests of your full constituency. Second,

if citizens perceive that your “inner circle” is a homogeneous and relatively closed set of people, this will affect your ability to govern. “We usually hear from a core group of individuals,” says Don Rosen, a Commissioner in Sunrise, Florida. “We really need to go out and spend more time engaging people on all sides of the city.”

Finally, this challenge calls into question the whole notion of “representativeness.” This guide describes some of the many ways that local officials are reaching out to citizens directly, rather than relying on other stakeholders to speak for them. In situations where it is impossible or impractical to engage directly with citizens on a major issue, officials need to know how their key allies are interacting with their constituencies.

Rethinking Boards and Commissions

Some local officials are starting to rethink their expectations of public commissions, boards and committees. Members of these bodies are often appointed with the understanding that part of their mission is to represent a particular interest group or segment of the population. But this may not be an appropriate or effective role for commission and panel members. “Instead of asking these people to be representative leaders, speaking on behalf of others, we should perhaps be asking them to be ‘engagement leaders,’ who are adept at bringing larger numbers of people to the table,” says Robin Beltramini, a city councilmember in Troy, Michigan.

To implement this approach, local officials would have to be clear about the role(s) they are asking stakeholders to play, and help them in their work by ensuring that they have the skills and support to engage citizens effectively. Will they be expected to help recruit members of their networks for new engagement initiatives run by the city or other organizations? Or is the expectation that they will be doing their own engagement work to ensure that the views of their constituents are represented authentically in policy discussions?

MORE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT KEY ALLIES:

- To whom do you turn (informally) for input and advice? How well does this group of informal stakeholders reflect the full demographic and geographic diversity of the community?
- How is this “inner circle” perceived by others in the community?
- In what ways do these stakeholders interact with larger networks of people?
- How many people serve on local commissions, boards, and other public committees? How well does this group of formal stakeholders reflect the full demographic and geographic diversity of the community?

POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS:

- Think about your community as a set of networks and groupings of people. Which networks are not represented among your informal or formal stakeholders? Reach out to leaders of these networks and find ways to bring them into the circle.
- Talk with city commissions and boards about these issues of representation and engagement – what kinds of roles do they think would allow them to contribute best to local governance?
- Work with a civic group, a community foundation, a United Way or another local partner to assess how well various kinds of grassroots organizations – neighborhood associations, PTAs, crime watch groups, advocacy groups and nonprofit organizations – are able to represent their constituencies. How do leaders within these groups and networks understand their roles? How do they engage their members?

How well are neighborhood associations and other grassroots groups serving their neighborhoods?

Key Questions to Ask about How to Engage the Public **QUESTION 4 OF 14**



Most communities have neighborhood associations, homeowner's associations, neighborhood watch groups, block clubs or neighborhood councils. In some neighborhoods, there may also be other groups and organizations – churches and other faith groups, Community Development Corporations, historic preservation associations or community organizing initiatives – led by people who have a similar sense of “ownership” and responsibility to care for their immediate surroundings. These groups vary somewhat in their roles, and how they operate, but in most cities they are viewed as the ‘ground floor’ of democracy – the groups that are closest and most accessible to the goals and concerns of local residents.

These neighborhood groups also vary greatly in their effectiveness. A great many attract only small, relatively homogeneous sets of residents, who do not seem to have either the commitment or the recruitment skills to involve more of their neighbors. Sometimes, the small numbers are also due to the fact that the meetings are not very interesting or interactive. Finally, neighborhood associations vary greatly in their connections with City Hall, and whether the groups are effective in helping citizens, officials, and city employees work together.

Building Neighborhood Leadership

Hickory, North Carolina (pop. 41,400)
Contact: Mandy Pitts, Communications Director,
(828) 261-2222 or mpitts@ci.hickory.nc.us

For the past 12 years the City of Hickory has supported “Neighborhood College,” a program that gives residents a comprehensive look at how the city works. A select group of 15-25 citizens is chosen through an application process to attend 10 professionally led sessions about the city's history, public services and engagement opportunities. The program's three goals are to empower, encourage and engage citizens.

Students are required to accumulate 140 credits in order to graduate. Attendance at class sessions is valued at 10 credits each (10 total classes) and attendance at city functions or meetings awards 20 credits per event. The college offers honors recognition for high achievers who complete the program with more than 140 credits. Graduation occurs in conjunction with a Hickory City Council Meeting.

Neighborhood College has a total of 236 alumni; roughly 15% of them are currently involved in local government in some way. Others share their knowledge with neighbors and take other leadership roles in the community.

MORE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT NEIGHBORHOOD GROUPS:

- How many neighborhood groups exist in the city?
- Do you have data on the levels of participation in each neighborhood group?
- Is there any formal structure that connects the neighborhood groups to one another?
- Is there any formal or informal understanding about the role of neighborhood groups in local decision-making?
- Do neighborhood groups regularly receive funding from local government or any other source?
- How does city staff interact with neighborhood groups – through a particular department or different departments on a case-by-case basis?
- How effective are the neighborhood groups at recruiting a broad base of residents?
- How often do neighborhood groups meet?
- Are neighborhood meetings run in more traditional ways (Robert's Rules of Order; or a speaker and Q&A), or are they more interactive and inviting?
- Do the neighborhood groups maintain email listservs, use social media or use other online tools to facilitate communication among neighbors?
- Are there block clubs or other groups that operate at a sub-neighborhood level?

POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS:

- Begin gathering data systematically on each neighborhood group.
- Consult *The Promise and Challenge of Neighborhood Democracy*, a joint publication of NLC, Grassroots Grantmakers and the Deliberative Democracy Consortium. (See Appendix)
- Convene leaders of neighborhood associations and other grassroots groups, and talk with them about how they engage their members.
- Work with a civic group, a community foundation, a United Way, or another local partner to assess the state of neighborhood governance in your city.

350 Block Clubs = Sustained Engagement

Cupertino, California (pop. 54,200)
Contact: Cupertino Community Relations Department,
(408) 777-3331 or communityrelations@cupertino.org

The City of Cupertino has fostered a system of block clubs that connect neighbors, distribute city information and build community. There are now 350 of these groups, covering one third of the city. "Our goal is 1,000 block clubs," says Mark Linder, director of parks and recreation for the city.

The block clubs mainly use email lists to keep people connected, along with block parties or other face-to-face meetings twice a year. The city provides training for block club leaders, and holds two city-wide meetings for block club leaders per year. About 5% of block club leaders are young people.

Crime prevention and disaster preparedness are two of the main issues that motivate block club members, but people also join for social reasons. Parents of school-age children are particularly active. The city has also used innovative ways to engage block clubs in major public decisions, including a "budgeting board game" that gave people a chance to consider different budget options and led to broad support for the resulting city budget.

Are there segments of the community that have historically been ignored or excluded?

Key Questions to Ask about How to Engage the Public **QUESTION 5 OF 14**



Residents Examine Race and Public Safety

Hopkinsville, Kentucky (pop. 32,000)
Contact: Hopkinsville Human Rights Commission,
(270) 887-4010 or bstandard@hopkinsvilleky.us

Starting in 2007, the Hopkinsville Human Relations Commission launched “Hoptown – Our Town,” a large-scale community dialogue, to bring people together to address racial tensions between townspeople and public safety officials. Because nearly half of the prison inmates in the region are people of color, community leaders realized they needed to look for solutions. More than 100 Hopkinsville residents took part in the dialogues, taking a hard look at the root causes of racial inequities in the criminal justice system. With support from the Human Relations Commission, Hoptown – Our Town has paved the way for change. In late 2009, participants came up with a number of plans through an action forum. By early 2010, the following steps had been taken:

- The chief of police and sheriff signed a joint proclamation supporting the Hoptown – Our Town recommendations.
- The Hopkinsville Police Department scheduled its first diversity training.
- Seven small grants were awarded to local organizations, with the aim of improving community-police relations.
- Hopkinsville’s leaders, including the police chief, sheriff and county attorney, agreed to support recommendations for building better relations between residents and public safety officials.

Hoptown – Our Town has plans to broaden participation in the dialogues, conduct community surveys to find out how people feel about the criminal justice system, and develop recommendations that might help local agencies reduce the number of people of color in the penal system.

Local officials sometimes come into office hoping – or even assuming – that they have a “blank slate” to work from in their efforts to engage different segments of the community. But history matters, and in most cities, the history of the relationship between City Hall and citizens includes a great deal of inequality and mistrust. Race is the most common and probably the most significant dividing line in local politics, but other kinds of differences (ethnicity, religion, class, gender, sexual orientation, age group, legal citizenship status, newcomers vs. old-timers) can also be critical. What happened in the past, and how people feel they have been treated in the past, will affect how they interact with local officials in the present.

Furthermore, biases and patterns of discrimination may be just as strong today as they were in the past. Local officials are faced with three facets of racism, religious bigotry and other ‘isms’: the historical damage they have done, the current damage they may be causing, and people’s perceptions about being ignored or excluded. All three can have a major impact on the relationship between government and citizens, and all three must be considered in any conversation about public engagement. Communities need to deal with the painful aspects of their history, they need to address current inequalities and they need to be able to communicate across their differences.

MORE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT HISTORICALLY MARGINALIZED GROUPS:

- Are there groups of people in your city who feel that they have been excluded or ignored?
- Are there particular events or developments in the history of your city that have had a major impact on how different groups of people get along, feel represented or work together?
- Have surveys or polls been conducted recently on residents' feelings about race, religion or other kinds of cultural differences? If so, what were the results?
- Have issues of difference been particularly 'hot' in your city recently? Has there been a recent high-profile incident that has raised concerns and tensions?
- Is there an 'achievement gap' between students of color and white students in the school system? If so, how is the community addressing it?
- How have issues of race and difference affected police-community relations?
- What kinds of public engagement efforts have been organized around issues of race, religion, or other kinds of difference? How successful were they? How are they perceived by various sectors of the community?

POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS:

- Gather data on how race, religion, and other demographic differences are evident in voter turnout, participation in public meetings, and other aspects of public life.
- Reach out to leaders in the faith community to get their perspectives on how issues of difference are playing out in the city.
- Convene a small, diverse set of local leaders for a frank conversation on how they think issues of difference are affecting the community.



In what ways are recent immigrants and other newcomers connected, or disconnected, from the rest of the community?

Key Questions to Ask about How to Engage the Public **QUESTION 6 OF 14**



Supporting Leadership, Volunteerism Among Recent Immigrants

Skokie, Illinois (pop. 66,400)
Contact: Ann Tennes, director of marketing and communications, (847) 933-8234 or ann.tennes@skokie.org

The Village of Skokie uses a number of programs and events to connect with recent immigrant communities, supporting leadership and volunteerism as well as involvement in public decision-making. Skokie's International Leadership Academy helps participants take on a greater community leadership role through volunteerism, service on a board or commission, or running for an elected position. Since 1991, the village has also been organizing the annual Skokie Festival of Cultures, a two-day outdoor event. The festival, which is supported by the Illinois Art Council and other smaller organizations, is an award-winning event that has attracted more than 380,000 visitors over the years.

In 2008, the village released a Directory of Immigrant Services with information on area services and programs for the international community. The village also supports the Niles Township ELL Parent Center, where students and their parents can get support with literacy and English as a Second Language classes along with a wide variety of other services and programs. For more see NLC's *Municipal Innovations in Immigrant Integration: 20 Cities, 20 Good Practices* (See Appendix).

Integrating newcomers can be a challenge and a great opportunity for any city. When the new arrivals are immigrants from a very different culture, the challenges and opportunities can be particularly significant. But any kind of dramatic shift in the population will have consequences. The relationship between newcomers and long-time residents can have a major impact on a city's political climate, school system, public services and level of economic prosperity.

Many local officials who reach out to recent immigrant communities also see this work as an essential public responsibility that comes with serving in elected office. Many also feel that working proactively to integrate newcomers can: help educate people about their rights and responsibilities; educate government about the needs, goals, and traditions of immigrant groups; help resolve tensions between different sets of people in the community; support newcomers to help solve public problems; and provide opportunities for new leaders to emerge.

MORE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT NEWCOMERS TO THE COMMUNITY:

- How is the population of your city changing? What are the patterns of immigration affecting your city?
- In what parts of the community are these changes most evident?
- Do you have data on the levels of participation and engagement of newcomers, especially recent immigrant communities?
- Do you have data on the economic conditions of recent immigrant communities?
- How significant are the language barriers in your city?
- What are the main community or cultural groups serving recent immigrant groups?
- How effective are these groups at reaching out to newer immigrants, representing their interests and engaging them in decision-making or problem-solving?
- Is there any formal or informal structure that connects immigrant communities to one another?
- How well are recent immigrants and more long-term residents working together?

POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS:

- Begin gathering data systematically on recent immigrant communities.
- Convene leaders of recent immigrant groups to find out more about their perceptions of the community, and their ideas for how to increase engagement.
- Consult NLC's *Civic Engagement and Recent Immigrant Communities* for more suggestions. (See Appendix)



How well are you supporting young leaders, and tapping into their potential?

Key Questions to Ask about How to Engage the Public **QUESTION 7 OF 14**



Educating young people to be productive citizens and future leaders is a cause that many local officials feel passionately about. Some officials have also recognized the potential of young people to be dynamic leaders today, capable of fulfilling all kinds of roles in public engagement initiatives.

In most cities, opportunities for youth leaders are still somewhat limited. Some communities have youth advisory groups that provide input to adult decision makers, but these experiences have generally been limited to a small number of students who operate within a proscribed sphere of influence. There are also volunteer opportunities for young people who want to work on race, crime, substance abuse and other public issues, but in most of these projects, adults have already determined the course of action.

Youth leadership is a potent civic asset, and local officials who want to engage the public would be wise to incorporate roles for young people in their planning. These roles should reinforce the belief that youth input leads to smarter public policies, and verify that young people can be dynamic citizens in their own right. They should serve as a proving ground for young leaders, giving them the skills and connections they need to continue their contributions to public life.

Young People as Engagement Leaders

Fremont, California (pop. 205,500)
Contact: Rena Dein, YAC Advisor/ Recreation Supervisor,
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The Youth Advisory Commission in Fremont not only provides a “youth perspective” in public decision-making, it engages large numbers of young people and adults in issues of concern to youth. To qualify for the Commission, candidates need to be residents of Fremont or attending one of Fremont’s schools, be entering 7th-12th grade and be willing to commit roughly six hours per month. Special consideration is given to underrepresented districts, schools and historical minorities. At present, 13 Commissioners are appointed by the City Council for 2-year, staggered, terms. The commission is self-sustaining, with some administrative support coming from an adult, who keeps track of most of the paperwork and other clerical duties.

Aside from reporting to the City Council, Commissioners organize and attend meetings, workshops and conferences to engage the public and explore issues of importance to teen life. Their annual flagship event, The Junior High Leadership Conference, won the California Healthy Cities Special Achievement Award from the California Healthy Cities and Communities Network. The commissioners plan, design and facilitate every aspect of the conference.

MORE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT YOUTH LEADERSHIP:

- What kinds of youth leadership opportunities are available in your city?
- How many young people take part in these activities? How diverse is the participation – do only the most high-achieving students take part, or is there a wider range of young people involved?
- Are these youth leadership opportunities supported by the school system, by local government or by other organizations in the community? How well do the adults involved work together?

POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS:

- Convene a group of young people and talk with them about the community and their roles in public life.
- Consult NLC's *Authentic Youth Engagement: A Guide for Municipal Leaders* and other resources from NLC's Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (See Appendix).
- Involve young people in the planning of public engagement initiatives.
- Appoint youth leaders to various public commissions and boards.



Have there been any deliberative engagement initiatives, led by local government or by other organizations, recently in your city?

Key Questions to Ask about How to Engage the Public **QUESTION 8 OF 14**



Groups That Have Led Deliberative Projects

- local governments
- school systems
- community foundations
- interfaith groups, community organizers
- libraries
- youth programs
- chapters of the League of Women Voters
- service clubs
- Chambers of Commerce
- neighborhood associations
- university Cooperative Extension services
- policy advocacy organizations

In many communities, there have been deliberative public engagement initiatives of one kind or another. These efforts are distinguished by the sheer numbers (and diversity) of people they engage, by their emphasis on small-group deliberations and by the amount of time participants spend discussing and acting on public issues; a typical project may involve hundreds of people, each of whom devotes at least several hours of their time. In these initiatives, the participants consider a range of policy options and have the chance to make up their own minds about what should be done.

Local governments have sometimes initiated these kinds of projects, in order to involve citizens in land use decisions, budgeting questions, visioning efforts or other issues. In other places, school systems have engaged residents in questions of school finance or redistricting. Planning departments, police departments, human relations commissions and a whole range of nongovernmental organizations (see box) have worked to involve citizens in one issue or another.

In some cities, a range of governmental and nongovernmental entities have done this kind of intensive public engagement, though for different reasons and with different goals. The history of these efforts is a valuable source of information for you. They may well have been successful at helping the community make important decisions, increasing trust between residents and officials and/or galvanizing citizens to take part in problem-solving.

They may also have raised false expectations, failed to attract a broad range of participants, led to unproductive discussions, or fallen short in other ways. Experiences like these can create bad memories that will make it difficult for local officials to engage citizens in the future. In any case, it is unlikely that you are working with a blank slate: the successes and failures of past public engagement initiatives will affect how people respond to any new plans.

MORE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT DELIBERATIVE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS:

- Were these initiatives successful at attracting participants? How many people participated, and how diverse was the turnout?
- Did these initiatives create reasonable, respectful discussions? Were the meetings facilitated? If so, how? What kinds of group process methods were used?
- Did these initiatives lay out a range of policy options for people to consider, or were they focused on advocating for a particular option or view?
- Did these efforts have online elements, or were they entirely face-to-face?
- Did these initiatives lead to policy changes?
- Were these initiatives successful at encouraging action by citizens and/or organizations outside government?
- Have any of the successful tactics that emerged in temporary engagement efforts been incorporated in the ways that local government operates? (for example, have certain facilitation methods, or recruitments strategies, been adopted for regular use by a city department or some other organization in the community?)
- Who was involved in organizing these initiatives – who are the experienced ‘engagers’ in your community?

POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS:

- Convene the experienced ‘engagers’ in your city to learn more about their efforts.
- Work with a civic group, a local funder, academic researchers, or other local partners to assess the lessons learned from deliberative public engagement efforts in your city.

Deliberating with Citizens to Plan and Act

Decatur Roundtables

Decatur, Georgia (pop. 18,900)

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<http://decaturnext.com/>

In 2010, the city of Decatur established a broad-based deliberative process, called Decatur Next, to develop the city's strategic plan for the next decade. They drew on lessons learned from the last planning process – the Decatur Round Tables of 2000 – and added a number of innovative online elements. The Decatur Next website incorporated video testimonials and allows citizens to review and discuss elements of the plan.

Starting in April 2010, more than 1,500 Decatur residents met in deliberative small groups to identify key concerns and pose crucial questions about the next ten years of community life in Decatur. Four broad principles were established from this process: Manage growth while retaining character; encourage a diverse and engaged community; serve as good stewards of the environment and community resources; and support a safe, healthy, life-long community.

In March 2011, Decatur's City Commission unanimously adopted the 2010 Strategic Plan. The implementation of the plan calls for significant effort from the city, citizen boards, non-profits and individuals over the next decade in order to help Decatur achieve its vision.

How are you using social media, and how are citizens using social media to connect with their neighbors, solve problems, and discuss local issues?

Key Questions to Ask about How to Engage the Public **QUESTION 9 OF 14**

Connecting Neighbors to Solve Problems

Boston, Massachusetts (pop. 645,000)
Contact: Joseph Porcelli, Neighbors for Neighbors,
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Neighbors for Neighbors is a communication platform that links 18 networks, one for each neighborhood in Boston, through a social networking medium. The organization does not have an issue base or policy agenda, but rather strives to empower neighborhoods to define those items on their own.

Many local stakeholders help enrich the discussions. City employees, police officers, nonprofit program coordinators and other leaders share information and interact with members to help their constituents solve problems. Municipal personnel can also message all members to mobilize them around immediate threats, such as spikes in crime or public health hazards.

Through blogs, forum discussions, photos, videos, music, groups and embeddable media, users can get answers to their questions, find solutions to their needs, promote community events, share media, and organize and participate in interest groups. Users also participate in neighborhood zone groups where they communicate about neighborhood happenings such as community projects, crime, block parties and yard sales. The network enjoys over 6,500 visitors each month.



Local officials are increasingly determined to engage their constituents online. But local leaders sometimes overlook the first step they should take: mapping out how residents are using online technologies and how they are sorting themselves into online groups and networks. In that sense, online engagement is not so different from the traditional face-to-face work: to involve the public, you first need to map out where they are and what they belong to.

Some communities now have a full complement of blogs, listservs, news sites and other online spaces that cover local news, politics and community. Neighborhood-level online spaces – sometimes called “hyperlocal” sites – are also growing rapidly. Government sites are also getting more traffic, and more people are asking for online opportunities to provide input to government, rather than simply downloading information from government.

The concern about the “digital divide,” which used to focus on the relatively simple question of how many (and what kinds of) people had Internet access, has become much more complicated. Though the level of access continues to rise, there are still disparities, particularly between people of different income levels. There are also important differences in the hardware people are using to access the Internet. For example, younger people, people of color, and those with lower income levels are more likely to use cell phones and other mobile devices than desktop computers. Rather than focusing only on the question of who has Internet access, local officials need to understand what kinds of technologies will reach particular segments of the population. And above all, they need to know where people are gathered online, and how to connect and build relationships with those networks.

MORE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA:

- What are the main online spaces where people can find out, and comment on, what is happening in your city?
- Are there any neighborhood-level online forums?
- What is the general tenor of the discussion in these online spaces? Do they have well-established and well-enforced community guidelines governing the behavior of people who contribute posts or comments? Are people allowed to log in anonymously, or must they use their real names?
- What is your sense of whether and how different groups in your city – young people, seniors, recent immigrants, and underserved households – are using online technologies?

POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS:

- Conduct a more comprehensive mapping project of local online spaces.
- Convene a set of local bloggers and other online leaders, and talk with them about the state of the local online community.
- Review the technologies being used at City Hall, and consider whether they are sufficient for greater outreach and interaction with the public online.
- For up-to-date information on citizens' use of online technology and their expectations of government, see reports from the Pew Center for the Internet and American Life, and the Knight Foundation's work on the "Information Needs of Local Communities."
- Conduct a more comprehensive survey of Internet use in your community, to find out what kinds of people have access, what kinds of hardware they are using, and where they congregate online.



Is local government data available online, and how effectively does it complement and inform public engagement?

Key Questions to Ask about How to Engage the Public **QUESTION 10 OF 14**



Using data to help citizens identify problems

DC 311
Washington, DC (pop. 599,600)
Contact: Office of Chief Technology Officer,
(202)727-2277 or <http://octo.dc.gov>

DC 311 is an iPhone and Facebook combination application that enables users to report physical problems in Washington, DC. It allows iPhone users to document physical issues by taking photographs of graffiti, potholes and other problems. The report is located using Global Positioning System (GPS) capabilities of the phone and automatically uploaded to the city's 311 database. The system also allows Facebook users to view and submit service requests by category and by location on Google Maps. DC 311 was not actually developed by city staff: it was the winning entry in an "Apps for Democracy" contest run by the DC government.

Local officials all over the country are working hard to provide more information to citizens. To some critics, the pace of this transparency movement seems slow, but it is a trend with significant momentum. Transparency advocates inside and outside government argue that making more information publicly available is an empowering act that will help rebuild trust between citizens and government.

Cities are making many different kinds of data available, including crime statistics, city budgets, schedules for public works improvements, environmental indicators and information on public facilities. Some of these data streams have been combined with geo-location technologies (either by city staff or by tech-savvy citizens) to create interactive maps – showing where certain types of crime are occurring, for example, or which streets have the most potholes.

Many of these transparency efforts have succeeded in appealing to, and tapping into the talents of, increasingly tech-savvy citizens. It is often less clear how they fit as part of a broader engagement strategy. Transparency can also bring new challenges for local officials, since it is likely to expose government mistakes or inefficiencies. To use the data effectively, citizens and local officials need engagement activities or structures that will help them absorb, analyze and interpret it.

This is not a task to be left to the 'techies' in local government. "This is not just a technical matter for the tech support people," says Steve Clift of e-democracy.org. For improving local online support for democracy, Clift recommends "a community approach coordinated by a community leader."

MORE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT ONLINE TRANSPARENCY:

- What work has already been done to make local government more transparent?
- Are citizens using other online sources to get data and information about local issues and local government?
- Does the format of the data make it easy for people to see how government services and policies affect people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, neighborhoods, age groups other demographic or geographic categories? (In other words, can it be aggregated according to key variables?)
- Are there regular opportunities – either online or face-to-face – for citizens to come together to discuss and assess the data you are providing? Are these informal gatherings, or is there some level of structure and process to the meetings? What is the role of local officials or city staff in these settings?

POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS:

- Ask city staff: what kinds of information would help citizens understand city services and functions?
- Begin asking a range of community leaders: What kinds of information are citizens looking for?
- Convene local online transparency advocates, to hear from them how they are using government data, and what kinds of information they are looking for.
- Reach out to neighborhood associations and other grassroots groups to find out what kinds of data, and in what formats, would be helpful to them.

How much is the city spending – and saving – on public engagement annually?

Key Questions to Ask about How to Engage the Public **QUESTION 11 OF 14**

Coming up with a cost-benefit analysis for public engagement activities in your city can be a difficult but rewarding exercise. You may discover that some of the resources allocated to engagement are not being used wisely; you may also find that in some cases, devoting more resources to engagement could save the city substantial amounts of time and money. Calculating engagement costs may also help you answer skeptics who argue that public engagement is a ‘frill’ – you can show how it is already built into the work of government.

Most cities do not specify a total amount for public engagement in their annual budgets. Financial costs and budget line items only provide part of the picture; the bulk of the cost to local government typically comes in the form of staff time

devoted by city employees. Furthermore, public engagement responsibilities are often spread among many different staffers, and represent only a small portion of their time. Finally, employees are often caught up in tasks that are labeled as “public engagement” but which are fairly superficial and do not involve large numbers of citizens in a meaningful way.

Understanding what you are spending on engagement in money and staff time can help you decide how to leverage those investments more effectively. It can also help you and your allies determine how resources outside local government might be added to the mix, in order to make public engagement more of a shared community responsibility.

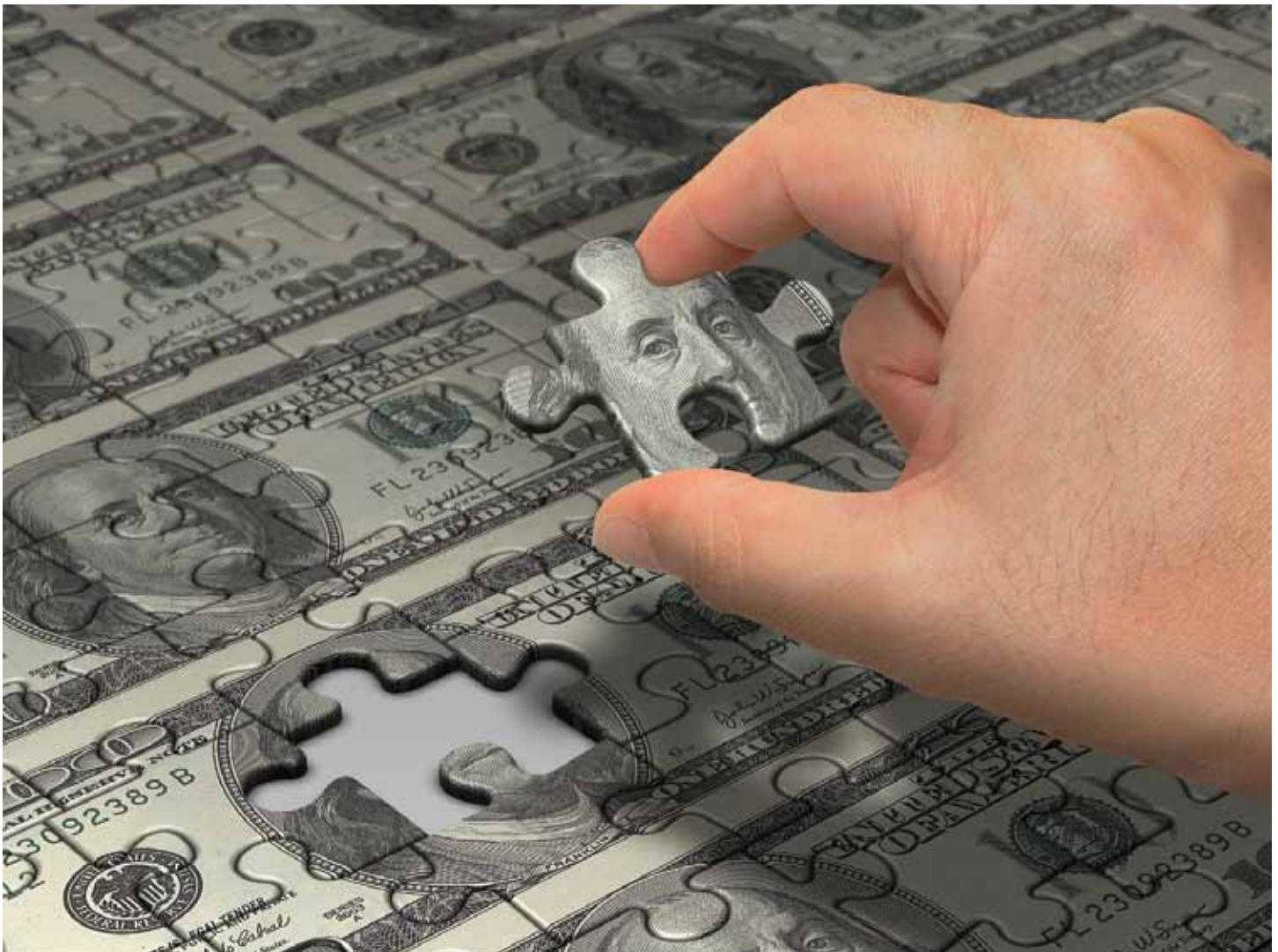


MORE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT SPENDING ON PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

- How does public engagement show up in line items on the city budget?
- Who are the principal city staffers carrying out public engagement work, and how much of their time do they spend on it?
- Can you estimate the cost of even the small portions of staff resources spent on public engagement?
- How much time do the volunteers serving on city commissions, boards and committees spend on public engagement?
- Consider a situation – a policy decision, or a government plan of some kind – where there was little public engagement carried out. Were there any costs – in terms of delays, plans not implemented, misallocations of staff time or stalemates on policy – incurred by government in that situation?

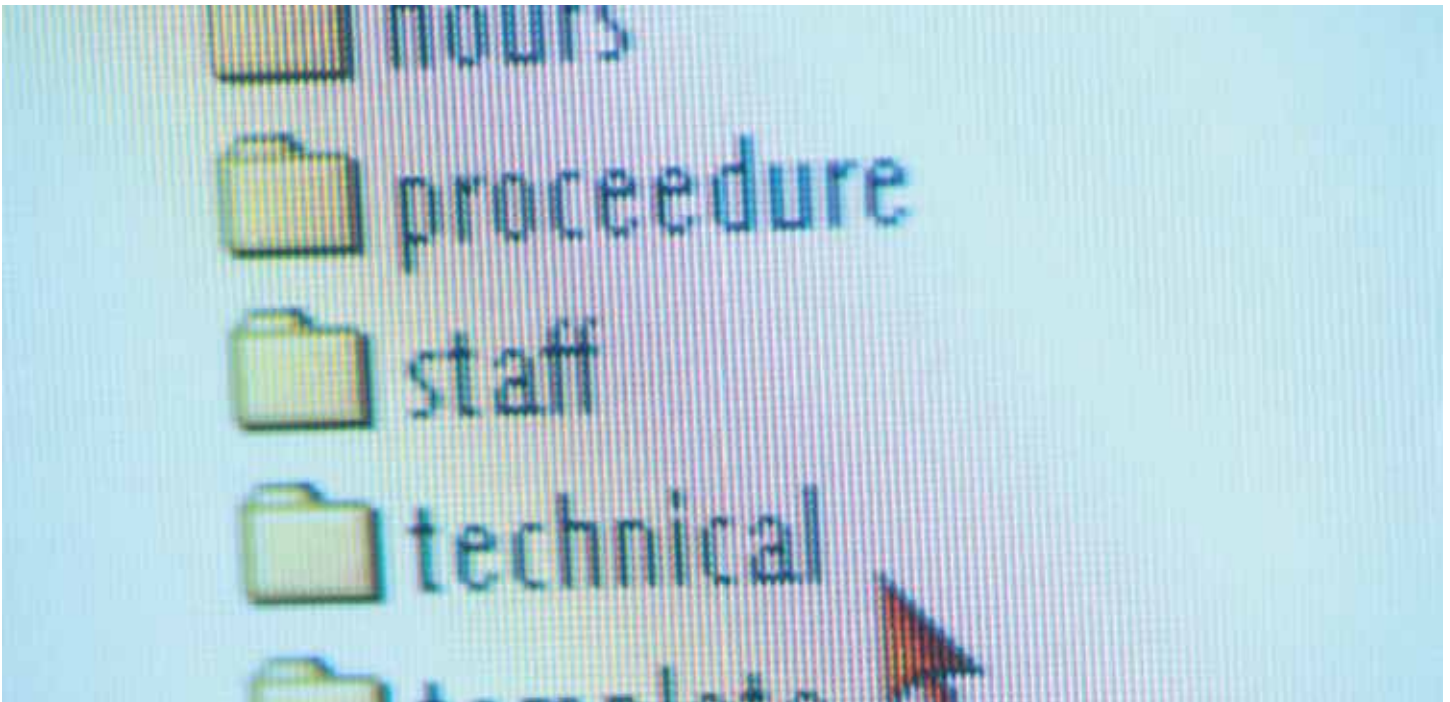
POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS:

- Carry out a ‘public engagement audit’ to determine how much money is spent on this work at City Hall.
- Reach out to other organizations in the community that do public engagement work – school systems, nonprofit organizations, civic groups, local foundations, service clubs, community organizing groups, neighborhood associations – to get a better sense of the money and time they are spending.
- Consider developing a cost-benefit analysis of engagement, by comparing policy decisions and planning processes that featured a high level of engagement with situations where the public was not heavily involved.



How are engagement activities and initiatives evaluated and assessed?

Key Questions to Ask about How to Engage the Public **QUESTION 12 OF 14**



Most cities have not thought through how they should track and evaluate their public engagement activities. This is also true of many other organizations – school systems, nonprofit organizations, local foundations, community organizing groups – that work to involve citizens. Even some of the most basic measures – such as how many people turned out for a public meeting – often go unrecorded. Outcomes of meetings, such as the decisions reached, recommendations made or actions taken by citizens or government, are seldom examined carefully or publicized widely.

Evaluation is also an area where citizens can play a role. As participants in (and sometimes the organizers of) various engagement activities, citizens are well-placed to gather and report information about levels and rates of participation. Online tools can make it easier for citizens to contribute some of this data, and help analyze it. (What factors affect overall turnout? How well are different populations represented? How satisfied are public managers, or citizens, with the process? What commitments were made?) Compiling a running record of the processes and outcomes of engagement can help answer some of the key questions asked by officials (for example, “How broad is the support for the recommendations I am hearing?”) and give everyone the chance to assess and improve the way engagement works.

What Counts as ‘Quality’ in Engagement?

The most successful engagement efforts have several characteristics in common. When evaluating democratic governance work, consider these four benchmarks:

- Scale and diversity of participation. How many people are taking part? How diverse are they? Are the people most affected by the issue or decision part of the process? Is it convenient for people to participate?
- Structured, informed discussions. How is information being provided? How are the meetings/interactions being facilitated? Are they truly participatory? Do people have a chance to consider a range of options or solutions? Are they being given a chance to make up their own minds?
- Valuing citizen experiences and goals. Does the process allow people to talk about why they care about the issue? Does it allow them to address issues of difference and equity? Does the project fit with their goals for being involved?
- Tangible actions and outcomes. How will local government and other decision-makers respond to the input received? How will the effort keep people connected to the policy-making process? Does the project encourage and support action by other organizations, by small teams of people, and/or by individual volunteers?

MORE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT:

- How does the city currently evaluate and assess its public engagement work?
- How do other organizations in the community evaluate and assess their engagement work?
- Have there been any independent evaluations carried out, by academics or other researchers, on either the general level of engagement in the community or on particular engagement initiatives?

POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS:

- Reach out to local academic researchers or other independent evaluators to explore possibilities for more and better evaluation of public engagement.
- Create tools that allow citizens to gather and assess information about public engagement processes.



What are the legal mandates and restrictions on how you interact with the public?

Key Questions to Ask about How to Engage the Public **QUESTION 13 OF 14**



Major Statutes Affecting Public Engagement

- Sunshine and Public Meetings Acts
- Freedom of Information Act
- Public participation requirements in agency statutes
- Administrative Procedure Act
- Negotiated Rulemaking Act
- Administrative or Government Dispute Resolution Act
- Uniform Mediation Act
- Uniform Arbitration Act

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Most of the laws that govern citizen participation are now decades old. Over that time, the relationship between citizens and governments has shifted, local officials have developed more intensive forms of public engagement, and a new generation of online tools has emerged. These changes have created some confusion about what “legal” citizen participation is supposed to look like.

On some kinds of decisions – such as bond issues, budgets and land use, local governments still follow a standard routine of public hearings, written notices and comment periods – even though these methods do not seem very effective at eliciting or structuring public engagement. Some local officials have experimented with ways of improving public hearings (see p. [x]). Others have stuck with the traditional formats, partly because they believe the laws on participation do not allow for such changes.

The laws, however, vary from place to place. They also vary in how they are interpreted; city attorneys, local officials and other legal experts often disagree on what the laws require. This uncertainty also affects newer forms of engagement, with officials and other leaders often asking whether their initiatives are compliant with the laws.

Online, many local officials and city employees are struggling with similar uncertainties. In fact, because the technologies are so new, officials tend to be even more concerned about the legalities of how they use the Internet. In most cases, they have more leeway than they realize, but without a clear sense of the law, they are more likely to withdraw than to communicate online with citizens.

MORE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK:

- Have there been any recent controversies over the legal aspects of citizen participation?
- How does the city determine whether a particular engagement practice is compliant with the relevant laws?
- Who are the people you consult on these kinds of questions? Do you feel confident in the ability of your legal advisors to cover questions about participation?
- Have your public engagement policies been reviewed to include provisions for social media, online communication and transparency?

POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS:

- Begin a more thorough examination of your local legal framework for participation. What are the local, state and/or federal laws that govern participation in your city? How do they vary by issue or decision? (For example, laws on engagement in planning and land use decisions may be different from those on participation in budgeting decisions.)
- How are these laws being interpreted by city attorneys or legal experts in other cities?
- Conduct additional research on how laws are being interpreted in terms of online engagement.

Do local officials and city employees have the skills, cultural awareness and organizational support to work productively with citizens?

Key Questions to Ask about How to Engage the Public **QUESTION 14 OF 14**



Restructuring City Hall for Engagement

San Jose, CA (pop. 964,000)

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When the City of San Jose first launched the Strong Neighborhoods Initiative ten years ago, it seemed to be a way of strengthening the relationship between local government and residents. As the initiative grew, it became clear that changes were necessary within City Hall itself in order for city employees to work effectively with the public.

San Jose changed the way its city finances are organized, moving from traditional departmental budgets to “city service area budgets” that cover offices in different departments. Some of the longstanding hierarchies and boundaries between departments were shifted. The city now has teams of people, representing different departments, who work with neighborhoods and particular groups of residents depending on the issue.

Public engagement often seems, at least at first, like an activity that is external to City Hall – it takes place out in the neighborhoods, or at public meetings or online. But it also has internal implications for the way that local governments operate. Public officials and employees may need different skills, higher levels of “cultural awareness” and better connections with other departments and organizations in order to be successful.

When local officials were asked in a 2009 NLC survey about the main obstacles to conducting more public engagement, “lack of training” came up as the most common response.¹ Many officials feel that they could use more training and skills in this area; an even larger number say that city staff need more background in recruitment, facilitation, issue framing and other public engagement skills.

Familiarity with engagement skills and techniques is only part of the picture; perhaps the greater benefit of training is that it gives officials and employees the chance to get comfortable with the whole idea of working more directly with citizens. City staff sometimes have a harder time with this transition than the elected officials. “The employees usually look to the elected officials – it can be a big shift for them to think that the citizens are their main constituency,” says Kevin Frazell of the League of Minnesota Cities. This may be particularly true for mid-level public employees, who are often more insulated from citizens than elected officials or rank-and-file employees like police officers or teachers.

Officials and employees may need to be more “culturally aware” and have the skills to reach all elements of the community. To do public engagement well, a city workforce needs the capacity to surmount language barriers, build relationships with politically marginalized groups and address issues of race and difference directly. Hiring a racially and culturally diverse mix of employees is one part of the response to these needs, though it is probably insufficient by itself, and it can be difficult to do in a time of shrinking city budgets. Local officials are also realizing they need to deal productively with race within City Hall – creating a working environment where people can discuss perceptions, stereotypes and tensions, and work through these issues. This kind of culturally aware workplace can be critical for recruiting job candidates of color, dealing with workplace disputes and explaining city hiring practices to the public.

Finally, the culture and working relationships within City Hall may also need to be reassessed. If the departments and agencies within local government act as separate ‘silos’ and do not work together effectively, it can be hard for city staff to interact with citizens on a broad range of issues. It can also be difficult for public employees to interact more democratically with the public if their workplaces are command-and-control environments. If city employees feel that they do not have the freedom to make changes, they will not react well to suggestions made by citizens.

MORE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT SKILLS, MINDSET, AND CULTURAL AWARENESS:

- What kinds of public engagement training are available to local officials and city employees?
- What kinds of cultural awareness training are available to local officials and city employees?
- How well does the racial and ethnic makeup of City Hall reflect the demographics of the city as a whole?
- To what extent do city employees – or citizens – feel hampered by a lack of cooperation between city departments?

POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS:

- Use surveys, focus groups, or other tools to better understand citizens' experiences working with City Hall.
- Convene small-group discussions with city employees to talk about ways to break down silos and interact with citizens more effectively.



PART TWO

Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure



Introduction

Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure

When it comes to interacting with the public, city leaders often find themselves in a crisis mode. Cities typically face all kinds of immediate challenges, including budget shortfalls, land use controversies, police-community tensions, natural disasters and threats to key public services. Citizens have different expectations, capacities and attitudes about government than their predecessors of a generation ago, and they are less likely to sit still when important decisions are being made.

Faced with the prospect of angry crowds, angry bloggers and declining trust in government, many city leaders have experimented with more productive ways of interacting with the public. These projects are examples of democratic governance, which NLC defines as “the art of governing a community in participatory, inclusive, deliberative and collaborative ways.” Because this work has been driven by immediate pressures, the development of democratic governance can be described with the phrase “necessity is the mother of invention.”

“Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure” lays out a collaborative process for using knowledge about how to engage the public to construct a better framework for public engagement. It helps you design your planning process by assembling an inclusive and diverse group of community partners, arranging for facilitation, sharing the answers to the questions from Key Questions to Ask about How to Engage the Public and addressing some of the common misconceptions about public engagement. The sample meeting agendas found in Appendix 1 can also be helpful in thinking through the planning process. “Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure” also provides discussion fodder for your planning group by describing a number of potential goals for democratic governance.

There are 12 potential building blocks that city leaders and municipal staff should consider as they work toward developing a shared civic infrastructure and fostering stronger local democracy:

Creating Spaces for Citizens

1. Democratic spaces in neighborhoods, schools and other settings
2. Democratic spaces online
3. Democratic spaces for young people
4. Buildings that can house citizen spaces — physical hubs for engagement
5. Engagement leadership

Building Skills and Capacity

6. Public information dissemination
7. Engagement skills training
8. Tracking, measurement and technical assistance to improve engagement

Improving Public Decision-Making and Problem Solving

9. Official public meetings that are more participatory and effective
10. Recurring deliberative processes on key issues and decisions
11. Systems that encourage innovation by citizens
12. Cross-sector problem-solving teams

These building blocks should help structure and stimulate a productive planning discussion. But keep in mind: no one knows your city better than you and the other people who live there. You should feel free to adapt the suggestions in this guide to fit the needs, goals and circumstances of your community.

Potential Building Blocks for Stronger Local Democracy

Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure

BUILDING BLOCKS	PRIORITIES THEY CAN HELP ADDRESS	POTENTIAL ACTIONS
CREATE SPACES FOR CITIZENS		
1. Democratic Spaces in Neighborhoods, Schools and Other Settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform and educate citizens. • Build a stronger sense of community. • Tap the power of citizens as problem-solvers. • Develop smarter, more widely supported policies. • Give marginalized voices a place at the table. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with and support neighborhood councils and associations to help them become more inclusive, participatory and effective. • Work with and support school councils and associations to help them become more inclusive, participatory and effective. • Help other groups — in faith communities, workplaces, clubs, and other settings — to become more inclusive, participatory and effective, and connect them with other groups and institutions. • Connect with online forums (see Building Block 2: Democratic Spaces Online).
2. Democratic Spaces Online	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform and educate citizens. • Build a stronger sense of community. • Develop smarter, more widely supported policies. • Support other components. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help establish neighborhood/school online forums. • Help establish local online forums. • Connect online forums with neighborhood and school groups (see Building Block 1: Democratic Spaces in Neighborhoods, Schools and Other Settings).
3. Democratic Spaces for Young People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform and educate citizens. • Build a stronger sense of community. • Tap the power of citizens as problem-solvers. • Develop smarter, more widely supported policies. • Give marginalized voices a place at the table. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a city-wide youth council. • Help establish other youth engagement programs and activities. • Connect with neighborhood, school, and online spaces (see Building Blocks 1 and 2).
4. Buildings That Can House Citizen Spaces — Physical Hubs for Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a stronger sense of community. • Support other components. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make existing hubs — schools, libraries, community centers, etc. — more available, more welcoming and more widely used. • Build or renovate new hubs.
BUILD SKILLS AND CAPACITY		
5. Engagement Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop smarter, more widely supported policies. • Give marginalized voices a place at the table. • Support other components. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form a city-wide council of engagement leaders. • Transform the role of city boards and commissions so that they engage, not just represent. • Create a citizens' academy. • Help create or connect with community leadership programs.
6. Public Information Dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform and educate citizens. • Support other components. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create customizable information systems that allow citizens to sign up for updates on issues and services that interest them. • Make more government records available online. • Create "serious games" that educate citizens on public issues and services. • Create online budget simulators that allow citizens to see the implications of different spending and revenue options. • Use barcode technology to provide information on public facilities.

7. Public Information Dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform and educate citizens. • Tap the power of citizens as problem-solvers. • Support other components. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide training for citizens and public employees in skills like recruitment, facilitation, issue framing, meeting design, crowdsourcing, volunteer management, social media management and aggregation, online forum moderation, asset mapping, GPS-based problem-solving, participatory budgeting, serious games and action planning.
8 Tracking, Measurement and Technical Assistance to Improve Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tap the power of citizens as problem-solvers. • Support other components. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create online processes that allow citizens to help track, measure and assess engagement. • Organize a cadre of experienced practitioners who can offer advice and guidance to engagement efforts.
IMPROVE PUBLIC DECISION-MAKING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING		
9. Official Public Meetings That are More Participatory and Effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a stronger sense of community. • Reduce tension around controversial issues. • Develop smarter, more widely supported policies. • Give marginalized voices a place at the table. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use more participatory formats for city council, school board, zoning committee and other city meetings (for example, replace “open mic” segments with small-group breakouts, Open Space, Twitterfalls or other interactive exercises). • Hold official meetings in places other than the traditional “downtown” locations. • Supplement official meetings with separate deliberative processes, either online or face-to-face.
10. Recurring Deliberative Processes on Key Issues and Decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform and educate citizens. • Build a stronger sense of community. • Reduce tension around controversial issues. • Tap the power of citizens as problem-solvers. • Develop smarter, more widely supported policies. • Give marginalized voices a place at the table. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institute an annual Participatory Budgeting process. • Mount large-scale community visioning processes at regular intervals. • Establish an annual large-scale deliberative process, using face-to-face and online tools, on the top issue of the year. • Incorporate deliberative processes in how high-profile land use decisions are made at the local and neighborhood levels. • Establish regular deliberations on issues of race, diversity and difference in neighborhoods, workplaces, and other settings. • Develop a procedure for using citizen juries, citizen panels or other “representative sample” approaches on more specific or technical issues.
11. Systems That Encourage Innovation by Citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop smarter, more widely supported policies. • Tap the power of citizens as problem-solvers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use online crowdsourcing to harvest and prioritize ideas for making progress on a particular issue, or for improving a public service. • Use wikis to involve people in creating a shared document or plan. • Create a local currency and use it to reward citizens for generating ideas or making other contributions to problem-solving.
12. Cross-Sector Problem-Solving Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a stronger sense of community. • Tap the power of citizens as problem-solvers. • Give marginalized voices a place at the table. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form inter-departmental teams within City Hall — or cross-sector teams including representatives from local government, school systems and other organizations — and assign them to work with different neighborhoods. • Establish online GPS-based systems that allow citizens to identify problems such as potholes and graffiti. • Provide online workspaces for small groups of citizens and public employees. • Create online processes that allow citizens to formulate ideas and then assemble in teams to implement them.

Beginning Your Planning Process

Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure

FORMING A TEAM OF PLANNING PARTNERS

The planning process is not an individual task or a City Hall exercise. It is an explicitly collaborative process, because a healthy local democracy benefits everyone, and is the responsibility of everyone. Local government and city leaders should not try to bear all the burdens or make all the decisions. Rather, long-term public engagement planning is a shared endeavour, and your first key task is assembling an inclusive list of local leaders you will invite to work with you as planning partners.

Your planning partners should understand that they are not being invited merely as advisors to local government; you are asking not only for “buy-in,” but for “weigh-in” from leaders who can help direct, implement and evaluate elements of the plan. The process will help form an alliance of leaders and organizations to support and sustain local democracy.

What is a citizen?

The word “citizen” has a rich history in American democracy. However it can also be a confusing word to use. Sometimes it is defined in a narrow, legal way, meaning only those people who hold U.S. passports or are eligible to vote. In this guide, “citizen” is used to mean “resident,” or “person.”

The process will be more productive if it includes a range of people who have various kinds of stake in the community and experience with public engagement. Some key leaders to consider are:

- Local officials (the mayor, city manager or administrator, key council members);
- School administrators, school board members, principals or other representatives from the school system;
- Representatives from community foundations or other local funders;
- Neighborhood leaders;
- Business leaders;
- Police officials;
- Leaders of formal or informal immigrant groups;
- Faith leaders;
- Representatives from youth councils or other youth leadership programs; and
- Representatives of other key civic organizations.

In addition to traditional leaders, consider partners who may be influential non-traditional leaders — especially people who have experience engaging citizens in public problem-solving. Some possibilities are:

- Leaders of interfaith groups;
- Community organizers;
- Library administrators;
- Representatives of service clubs;
- Administrators and faculty members of local colleges and universities;
- Staff of university cooperative extension services;
- Hospital administrators and staff;
- Local bloggers and online activists; and
- Policy advocates.

As you compile an invite list, keep your eye on the diversity of the group. One of the keys to effective democratic governance is the ability to reach out and involve every segment of the community, including people whose voices have been marginalized or who simply haven’t been directly engaged in the past. For the planning group, you need people who represent different racial and ethnic groups, different age groups, recent immigrant communities and other key segments of the population.

As the group begins to meet, it is important to ask “Who is not here who needs to be here?” Challenge the group to keep thinking about diversity and representation.

DESIGNING AN EFFECTIVE PLANNING PROCESS

As you develop your list of potential partners, it is important to think through the format and facilitation of the planning meetings themselves. This guide is structured so that it can be easily converted into meeting agendas; Appendix 1 contains some suggestions for how to do that, along with other process tips.

An experienced facilitator can be invaluable for helping you navigate a planning process. You will probably need one facilitator for every 8-10 planning team members. The role of the facilitator in the meetings should be to help the group use the written materials, to help them set and keep ground rules and to monitor the time.

A word of caution: having a city leader or city staffer serve as a facilitator may not be the optimal use of his or her expertise, and may create additional complications. Facilitators should focus on the process rather than contributing their own opinions and ideas. If possible, find a facilitator who has some experience with this role.

BRINGING EVERYONE UP TO SPEED

Key Questions to Ask about How to Engage the Public provides questions that city leaders might ask about their community in order to take stock of local democracy. Think about how to summarize and transmit the answers you have gathered. This information can be shared with your partners in a number of different formats, from short verbal presentations and PowerPoint slides to full research reports. Assemble the material you have, provide short, plain-language summaries of any longer or more academically worded reports and provide a brief summary of the overall conclusions. At least some of this material might also be shared online with the full community.

One realization you are likely to make is that your community already has at least some of the elements it needs to create a stronger local democracy. Some of these building blocks may need to be expanded, more broadly supported or connected to other assets. Other components may be present, but underutilized — for example, almost every city has schools, libraries and other physical spaces with the potential to be dynamic hubs for local engagement. Still other assets may need a higher level of support and assistance and would benefit even more from being part of a more concerted plan for civic infrastructure. Neighborhood associations, block clubs and homeowner's associations often fall into this category, since they are driven by citizen energy and expertise but still, for one reason or another, aren't sufficiently inclusive, participatory or effective. Finally, there are likely to be gaps in your existing civic infrastructure that might be filled by new programs or initiatives.

SUMMARIZING KEY LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

There are also some overall lessons to be learned from the public engagement efforts that have emerged over the last 20 years. Some of these findings may reflect the experience of your city, while others may be less familiar.

The most successful engagement initiatives seem to follow these four strategies:

1. They assemble a large and diverse “critical mass” of citizens (or in some cases, a smaller, demographically representative set of people, intended to serve as a proxy for the larger population). To achieve this kind of mass participation, organizers map out and connect with a wide variety of organizations and networks,

weaving together the strands of a large web of existing relationships, so that potential participants are recruited by people they already know and trust.

2. They involve those citizens in structured, facilitated small-group discussions, interspersed with large forums for amplifying shared conclusions and moving from talk to action. These have traditionally been face-to-face meetings, but increasingly they are being held online, and other online tools are being used to inform and complement them. A combination of face-to-face and online communication seems to be the best approach.
3. They give the participants in these meetings the opportunity to compare values and experiences, and to consider a range of views and policy options. This allows people of different opinions to decide together what they think should be done about a public issue.
4. They are intended to produce tangible actions and outcomes. There is some variation here: some efforts focus on applying citizen input to policy and planning decisions, while others also seek to effect change at other levels, including changes within organizations and institutions, actions driven by small groups of people, individual volunteerism and changes in attitude and behavior.

MYTHS ABOUT DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

It is also important to recognize that city leaders, other leaders, local government employees and citizens themselves all bring their own expectations and assumptions into any discussion of public engagement. Anticipating and working through these assumptions may be critical, especially in the early stages of your planning process.

Public officials and other leaders often bring assumptions about power — specifically that engaging and, to some extent, “empowering” citizens can reduce the power and authority of officials. Leaders will rarely voice these concerns, especially in public settings, but they are nonetheless real. The question of how engagement affects power is complicated; one frequent occurrence in public engagement projects is that citizen participants ask public officials for a clearer sense of their role and their formal or informal legitimacy. However, it is quite common to hear experienced officials say that through these initiatives, they “gave up some power in order to generate more power.”

Local government employees sometimes voice a related assumption: that engaging citizens in decision-making and problem-solving may somehow make government superfluous. This concern by people inside government usually comes as a surprise to those outside; in fact, one of the effects of proactive public engagement seems to be that citizens gain a stronger sense of the difficult decisions that public managers face, the commitment and expertise of public employees and the important roles being played by government.

One expectation that citizens often bring to this work is that getting involved in a democratic governance initiative will be a formal, contentious and purely political activity. One of the most common results described in evaluations of these projects is that the participants actually enjoyed the experience. On post-surveys, they often name learning, relationship-building and an increased sense of belonging to community as their most valued outcomes of the process.

Local officials sometimes come into office assuming that they have a “blank slate” to work from in their efforts to engage different segments of the community — that the history or even the current practices of discrimination will not affect their ability to engage the public. But history matters, and in most cities, the history of the relationship between City Hall and citizens includes a great deal of inequality and mistrust. Race is the most common and probably the most significant dividing line in local politics, but other kinds of differences (ethnicity, religion, class, gender, sexual orientation, age group, legal citizenship status, newcomers vs. old-timers) can also be critical. What happened in the past, and how people feel they have been treated in the past, will affect how they interact with local officials in the present.

Furthermore, biases and patterns of discrimination may be just as strong today as they were in the past. Local officials are faced with three facets of racism, religious bigotry and other “isms”: the historical damage they have done, the current damage they may be causing and people’s perceptions about being ignored or excluded. All three can have a major impact on the relationship between government and citizens, and all three must be considered in any conversation about public engagement. Communities need to deal with the painful aspects of their history, they need to address current inequalities and they need to be able to communicate across their differences.

Leaders of groups and organizations outside government often expect that public engagement is the sole responsibility of government, and that their primary role is representing their members.

In fact, for engagement to work (especially over the long term), non-governmental leaders must take shared ownership, particularly for bringing their members to the table.

Leaders, public employees and citizens alike seem to expect that engagement is extremely time-consuming, mainly because it requires more work to set up meetings and recruit participants. This expectation is difficult to assess, since it is relative — depending on the circumstances, not engaging the public can lead to a much longer, more drawn-out and contentious process. But in any case, one of the main reasons that some communities are thinking about stronger engagement infrastructure is that it promises to make working with citizens faster and easier: if citizens are already at least somewhat “mobilized,” and connected with government, the work of

mobilizing and connecting around a particular issue or decision doesn’t have to start from scratch.

Public officials and employees often assume that engagement is useful mainly as a better way of making public decisions. In fact, there seem to be other benefits of democratic governance — not only the “softer” effects on citizens (mentioned above), but more tangible and even measurable effects on trust in government, attachment to community, and even economic vitality. Some researchers now suggest that generalized feelings of engagement with a city have a statistically significant impact on local economic growth.

In a similar vein, local leaders usually treat the work of engagement as a matter of tools and methods — they adopt a situation-based approach, in which the public is only present when a crisis has occurred or a critical decision must be made. But while engagement is often successful in those situations, it seldom seems to help the community meet similar challenges in the future. Temporary engagement doesn’t seem to be sufficiently satisfying, game-changing, or meaningful either to the “engagers” or the “engaged.” It is also extremely difficult, mainly because the recruitment effort must start from the beginning every time. Occasional engagement often leads to improved policies, decisions, and problem-solving, but it may not improve governance, especially over the long term.

At the same time, it is unrealistic to expect citizens to be “engaged” — at least in the way we have been doing and defining engagement — all the time. Most people are too busy to be involved in anything that doesn’t relate directly to work or family obligations. They are not interested in the vast majority of the decisions made by public officials, other local leaders or by frontline public employees. When citizens are engaged in a more sustained, long-term community structure or activity, it is usually because there are a range of reasons to be involved, such as the chance to socialize with neighbors, the opportunity to focus on children and young people, or the prospect of enjoying music and food.

Overcoming this challenge, and creating a framework for engagement that meets the needs and goals of both leaders and citizens, is the central question of long-term democratic governance planning.

Potential Priorities for Democratic Governance in your Community

Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure

In developing a long-term public engagement plan, it is important to think carefully about everyone's interests and goals. Why is it beneficial for the community to have people involved in public life? Why is it beneficial for people to be involved? One common mistake is to focus on the engagement goals of public officials and other local leaders, and not take into account why citizens might want to be engaged.

Here are some potential answers to the question of "Why is it important for people to be engaged?"

PRIORITY 1 – INFORM CITIZENS ABOUT PUBLIC ISSUES AND ABOUT THEIR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES.

In a democracy it is essential that people know their rights and responsibilities. It is also important that they have some basic level of knowledge about public issues, and about opportunities to have a say in the policymaking processes on those issues. Engaging them can help them learn more about their legal protections, their civic responsibilities (such as voting) and how their governments function.

RELEVANT BUILDING BLOCKS:

1. Democratic spaces in neighborhoods schools, and other settings
2. Democratic spaces online
3. Democratic spaces for young people
6. Public information dissemination
7. Engagement skills training
10. Recurring deliberative processes on key issues and decisions

PRIORITY 2 – BUILD A STRONGER SENSE OF COMMUNITY, CONNECTEDNESS AND ATTACHMENT TO PLACE.

Communities are more successful, both socially and economically, when people are connected with one another and feel an attachment to where they live. Furthermore, this feeling of attachment may be inextricably interwoven with efforts to promote engagement: "It is hard to have citizen engagement without a sense of community, and it is hard to fashion a sense of community without citizen engagement," argue the political scientists James Svara and Janet Denhardt. This sense of belonging, and of "feeling heard" (an emotion our Founding Fathers would have called "public happiness" is perhaps the most intangible, and also the most prevalent, outcome of successful public engagement efforts.

PART 2 INTRODUCTION

RELEVANT BUILDING BLOCKS:

1. Democratic spaces in neighborhoods, schools and other settings
2. Democratic spaces online
3. Democratic spaces for young people
4. Buildings that can house citizen spaces — physical hubs for engagement
9. Official public meetings that are more participatory and effective
10. Recurring deliberative processes on key issues and decisions
12. Cross-sector problem-solving teams

PRIORITY 3 – REDUCE TENSIONS AROUND CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES AND BETWEEN DIFFERENT GROUPS OF PEOPLE.

Many communities are now deadlocked between different issue interests, between demographic populations or more generally between citizens and government. Some of the tensions arise from a lack of understanding about what motivates people who are different from us, or who have fundamentally different opinions. In most cases, the only way to alter this dynamic is to bring people together in safe environments where they can learn more about one another, share their experiences and motivations and discuss public issues in a more structured way.

RELEVANT BUILDING BLOCKS:

9. Official public meetings that are more participatory and effective
10. Recurring deliberative processes on key issues and decisions

PRIORITY 4 – TAP INTO THE POWER OF CITIZENS TO HELP SOLVE PUBLIC PROBLEMS.

Citizens can bring many skills and talents to bear on public problems and opportunities. The various groups and networks they belong to — including businesses, faith institutions, neighborhood groups and many other associations — are also in themselves sources of great problem-solving capacity. Engagement can bring those assets into play by giving people better opportunities to solve public problems and make improvements to their neighborhoods and city. Asking residents to take a hand in problem-solving can lead to better, more sustainable solutions and reduce the strain on government.

RELEVANT BUILDING BLOCKS:

1. Democratic spaces in neighborhoods, schools and other settings
3. Democratic spaces for young people
7. Engagement skills training
8. Tracking, measurement and technical assistance to improve engagement
10. Recurring deliberative processes on key issues and decisions
11. Systems that encourage innovation by citizens
12. Cross-sector problem-solving teams

PRIORITY 5 – HELP LOCAL GOVERNMENT DEVELOP SMARTER, MORE BROADLY SUPPORTED PUBLIC POLICIES AND SERVICES.

Engagement of all kinds of people is essential for ensuring that public policies reflect what residents want, and that public services are provided efficiently and effectively. Citizens need to understand the trade-offs and limitations inherent in public decisions, and they need to know about the services available to them. Public managers need to understand the priorities, needs, concerns and skills of the people they are trying to represent and serve. Traditional methods of gathering input — public hearings, comment periods — usually fail to harvest new ideas or make people feel heard; more proactive methods can help ensure that the resulting policies are more informed and more broadly supported.

RELEVANT BUILDING BLOCKS:

1. Democratic spaces in neighborhoods, schools and other settings
2. Democratic spaces online
3. Democratic spaces for young people
5. Engagement leadership
9. Official public meetings that are more participatory and effective
10. Recurring deliberative processes on key issues and decisions
11. Systems that encourage innovation by citizens

PRIORITY 6 – GIVE MARGINALIZED PEOPLE A PLACE AT THE TABLE.

In most communities, there are fairly stark political and economic inequities between different socioeconomic groups. A key goal of public engagement planning should be to amplify those “marginalized” voices, and to provide arenas where they can bring their ideas and concerns to the table. Engagement with an eye to social and racial equity will give the potentially “involved” — rather than just the “involved” — a chance to help set the agenda for public discussion and decision-making.

RELEVANT BUILDING BLOCKS:

1. Democratic spaces in neighborhoods, schools and other settings
3. Democratic spaces for young people
5. Engagement leadership
9. Official public meetings that are more participatory and effective
10. Recurring deliberative processes on key issues and decisions
12. Cross-sector problem-solving teams

Democratic Spaces in Neighborhoods, Schools and Other Settings

Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure *BUILDING BLOCK 1 OF 12 – CREATING SPACES FOR CITIZENS*

Most communities have neighborhood associations, homeowner's associations or neighborhood councils — these are geographically based groups that usually hold monthly face-to-face meetings and are governed by a board or steering committee. Local school councils, parent-teacher associations and other school-based groups are close cousins, with many of the same strengths and limitations. How effective

they are varies wildly from city to city, and from place to place within each city. Many of these groups are run by a small set of active citizens who do not have the time or skills to involve others. While the work on this building block will rarely have to start from scratch, it will require a careful rethinking of the structure, format and role of citizen spaces at the “ground floor” of democracy.



Creating Settings for Neighborhood Action

Louisville, Kentucky (pop. 741,000)

Contact: Anthony Smith, Director of Network Organizing

(502) 583-1426, connect@makechangetogether.org, www.makechangetogether.org

Four Louisville neighborhoods — California, Phoenix Hill, Shelby Park and Smoketown — have helped to build the Making Connections Network with the support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The network, which has more than 3,200 members, functions as a learning community of local leaders, residents, faith-based organizations, government, businesses and schools. Members of the network meet monthly in their neighborhoods to develop strategies in the following priority areas: living in strong, connected neighborhoods; doing satisfying work; enjoying and accumulating the money that is earned; and raising children healthy and ready for school. Specialists in each of these areas can be brought in to share their skills and expertise.

The network has achieved results in all four priority areas. For example, more than \$4 million has been generated in neighborhood salaries from job placements through the network, and more than \$2 million in Earned Income Tax Credits was returned to families from free tax preparation services. In collaboration with the city and several local agencies, the network organized Kindergarten Countdown, a program that educates parents and children about the transition to kindergarten. Groups are also working on ways to attract more customers to local farmers markets for healthier food choices.

The project was a finalist in the 2010 Community Matters Competition organized by the Orton Family Foundation, a national organization working on citizen engagement and community development.

PRIORITIES TO ADDRESS:

- Inform and educate citizens.
- Build a stronger sense of community.
- Tap the power of citizens as problem-solvers.
- Develop smarter, more widely supported policies.
- Give marginalized voices a place at the table.

POTENTIAL ACTIONS:

- Work with and support neighborhood councils and associations to help them become more inclusive, participatory and effective.
- Work with and support school councils and associations to help them become more inclusive, participatory and effective.
- Help other groups — in faith communities, workplaces, clubs and other settings — to become more inclusive, participatory and effective, and connect them with other groups and institutions.
- Connect with neighborhood or local online forums.

WORK BEST WHEN:

- They operate or are linked to a neighborhood online forum.
- They have some sort of staffing (a director paid by the association, a city employee or a highly committed volunteer).
- The director and other leaders have the skills to recruit members, facilitate discussions and design meetings.
- They have some regular, legitimate role in local policymaking (for example, the city council, school board and/or city departments regularly consult with the group on issues related to that neighborhood or school, delegates some decisions to them and/or consults them on city-wide issues).
- They have access to, and support from, middle-level city and school employees, such as police lieutenants, principals and planners.
- There is some process that brings together people from different neighborhood or school groups so that they can compare notes, deal with conflicts and discuss common priorities.
- They provide social and cultural opportunities as well as political ones.
- They provide meaningful roles for young people.
- They engage people in action as well as discussion.

Democratic Spaces Online

Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure *BUILDING BLOCK 2 OF 12 – CREATING SPACES FOR CITIZENS*



Local and neighborhood-level online forums are proliferating dramatically in communities all over the country. They can be very simple technologically, often consisting of nothing more than an e-mail listserv.

An Arena for Public Life Online

Rockville, Maryland (pop. 61,000)

Contact: Brad Rourke, (240) 449-8172, rockvillecentral@gmail.com, www.facebook.com/RockvilleCentral

Two local residents launched a community blog, "Rockville Central," in 2007. The purpose of blog was to create an open, fair and civil space in which residents could share views about their city. News, information and volunteer opportunities were also featured on the site. The online community now has more than 1,500 participants, including the mayor and members of the city council. The site is among the top local blogs in the state of Maryland. In 2011, Rockville Central moved to Facebook, but users do not have to join Facebook to visit the site.



PRIORITIES TO ADDRESS:

- Inform and educate citizens.
- Build a stronger sense of community.
- Develop smarter, more widely supported policies.
- Support other components.

POTENTIAL ACTIONS:

- Help establish neighborhood/school online forums.
- Help establish local online forums.
- Connect online forums with neighborhood and school groups.

WORK BEST WHEN:

- They are operated by, or connected to, neighborhood or school associations and groups.
- They are moderated.
- They utilize a registration system that requires participants to use their real names.
- They are connected to face-to-face events and meetings.
- There are computers at libraries, schools and other public places that are available, free of charge, to people who do not have computers at home.
- There are free opportunities for people to get basic training in online skills.

Democratic Spaces for Young People

Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure *BUILDING BLOCK 3 OF 12 – CREATING SPACES FOR CITIZENS*

Young people (high school students and young adults) are an often-overlooked civic asset. Establishing youth councils or other structures for youth leadership not only brings the perspectives of the younger generation to the table, it also catalyzes and enriches engagement efforts generally.



Environments for Youth Leadership

Novi, Michigan (pop. 55,000)

Contact: Sheryl Walsh, Director of Communications

(248) 735-5628, swalsh@cityofnovi.org, www.cityofnovi.org/government/YouthCouncil.asp

The 19-member Novi Youth Council contributes to city decision-making and conducts a range of activities that engage hundreds of other young people each year. Members of the council are selected each year from area high schools by the city council. One role of the youth council is to make recommendations to city council concerning the needs of children, youth and families. The youth council also organizes activities in three topic areas: drug and alcohol prevention, connecting teens and seniors and teen depression and suicide. These initiatives include:

- The Youth Hope Convention, with more than 500 high school students attending annually. The convention educates teens about causes of depression, its attached stigma and methods of treatment and prevention.
- Meetings with middle school students every May in which Youth Council members describe the workings of Novi City government and invite students to participate in the Memorial Day Parade.
- “Addicted to Movies, not Drugs,” an all-night movie marathon organized in partnership with the Novi Police Department and a local chain of movie theatres.
- “Sticker Shock,” a project in which teens place more than 6,000 warning stickers on packs of alcoholic beverages.
- The “Senior to Senior” Prom, in partnership with Walton Wood, a regional chain of senior living facilities. More than 100 Novi seniors twice a year spend an evening with members of the Novi Youth Council, with dinner and dancing.
- The annual Fall for Novi, a local festival that includes a parade, fair and other events. The Youth Council organizes children’s games and presents the city to visitors.

The annual budget for the youth council is \$500; a key element of the council’s success is volunteer help from residents, businesses and local and regional organizations.

PRIORITIES TO ADDRESS:

- Inform and educate citizens.
- Build a stronger sense of community.
- Tap the power of citizens as problem-solvers.
- Develop smarter, more widely supported policies.
- Give marginalized voices a place at the table.

POTENTIAL ACTIONS:

- Create a city-wide youth council.
- Help establish other youth engagement programs and activities.
- Connect with neighborhood, school and online spaces listed above.

WORK BEST WHEN:

- It is clear that the youth leaders are being selected to help engage their peers, not simply represent their interests.
- The youth leaders are a diverse group, and include young people who are non-traditional leaders in addition to students who already excel academically.
- They operate or are linked to an online forum.
- Youth leaders are trained in engagement skills, along with adults.
- City-level decision-making bodies and neighborhood groups adopt a process for recognizing and incorporating youth contributions.

Buildings That Can House Citizen Spaces – Physical Hubs for Engagement

Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure *BUILDING BLOCK 4 OF 12 – CREATING SPACES FOR CITIZENS*



A Building that Serves Community

Herndon, Virginia (pop. 23,000)
Contact: Marianne O'Riley, NRC Manager,
(703) 435-6830, marianne.o'riley@herndon-va.gov,
nrc@herndon-va.gov, www.herndon-va.gov

The Herndon Neighborhood Resource Center (NRC), which opened in 1999, is a collaborative effort of the Town of Herndon and Fairfax County. NRC offers integrated services to address the complex social and physical challenges facing many of Herndon's neighborhoods. It is within walking distance of many of the neighborhoods and is located on a bus route. The NRC building features include three multipurpose rooms, meeting rooms for service providers and clients and a 2,000-square-foot learning center with a state-of-the-art computer lab. Audio/visual equipment is available for programs and activities. The NRC's Community Association Reference Library contains written and audio materials to assist and strengthen community associations. Also located in the NRC is the Herndon Police Department's Community Resource Office, offering a variety of crime prevention programs, including the Neighborhood Watch Program. NRC staff manages the day-to-day operations of the center, including scheduling all programs and activities. The NRC staff is bilingual in English and Spanish and provides minor translation assistance to Town of Herndon community associations.

Most cities already have a number of buildings that can be important assets for long-term engagement planning. Some of these facilities may already be fulfilling their potential as hubs for engagement, while others may be under-utilized. Potential hubs include schools, libraries, community centers, recreation centers, hospitals, community colleges and universities, churches and other faith institutions, businesses and City Hall itself. Plans for the renovation of these buildings, and the construction of new ones, should be influenced by the community's long-term civic infrastructure needs.

PRIORITIES TO ADDRESS:

- Build a stronger sense of community.
- Support other components.

POTENTIAL ACTIONS:

- Make existing hubs — schools, libraries, community centers, etc. — more available, more welcoming and more widely used.
- Ensure that each neighborhood or area of the city has access to nearby facilities.
- Ensure that other “citizen spaces,” such as neighborhood or school associations and groups, have a strong role in the management and use of the hub.
- Build or renovate new hubs.

WORK BEST WHEN THEY INCLUDE:

- Large and small meeting rooms.
- Computer workstations that are open to the public.
- Free assistance for people using the computers.
- Free wireless Internet access.
- Spaces that are designed for children and young people.
- A safe and welcoming atmosphere.

Engagement Leadership

Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure *BUILDING BLOCK 5 OF 12 – CREATING SPACES FOR CITIZENS*



It is important to uphold and preserve shared leadership of public engagement, since democratic governance ought to be a shared priority and a shared responsibility. Engagement efforts thrive only when citizens trust they are not being co-opted by any particular agenda or interest group, and when a wide range of groups and networks are helping to bring people to the table.

Regional Civic Stewardship

Puget Sound Region, Washington (estimated pop. 3,600,000)

Contact: Jeff Aken, Cascade Agenda Cities Project Manager

(206) 905-6928, jeffa@cascadeland.org, <http://cascadeagenda.com/cities/cascade-agenda-community-stewards>

In the Puget Sound Region, Community Stewards lead networks of active citizens in the development of land use processes that help to save the region's historical and natural character. The Community Stewards Initiative was launched in 2009 by the Cascade Land Conservancy (CLC), one of the Washington's largest land conservation organizations, in cooperation with The Cascade Agenda Cities, a coalition of local public and educational organizations, businesses and individuals. Through these organizations, Community Stewards are provided an organizational structure and communication tools to support project development, including an online forums, technical staff support and training. CLC also works with Community Stewards to support legislation and projects that match the goals of the Cascade Agenda. The Washington Women's Foundation awarded the program an \$87,500 grant to fund programs and projects. The Community Stewards are at work in several communities. In 2009, Citizens in Tacoma took action after participating in a local land use planning process and developed campaigns to improve their city's livability and environment. In Tukwila, residents developed campaign strategies to help St. Thomas Parish start a new community garden. The garden serves refugee families from Burma and Bhutan, and provides food for the church's food bank. By partnering with local organizations, the residents of Edmonds and Shoreline are developing "complete streets" that promote non-motorized transportation.

PRIORITIES TO ADDRESS:

- Develop smarter, more widely supported policies.
- Give marginalized voices a place at the table.
- Support other components.

POTENTIAL ACTIONS:

- Form a city-wide council of engagement leaders.
- Transform the role of city boards and commissions so that they engage, not just represent.
- Create a citizens' academy.
- Help create or connect with community leadership programs.
- Ensure that a wide range of people, reflecting the full diversity of the community, are serving in leadership roles and participating in leadership training opportunities.

WORK BEST WHEN:

- They bring together people who have been doing public engagement work on different issues or in different arenas.
- They represent a broad array of groups and organizations in the community.
- The process for appointing or electing members is transparent and fair.
- Each participant brings resources and commitments to the table, rather than relying on government or any other institution to be the sole implementer of new policies and initiatives.
- Councils, boards and commissions have online platforms that allow them to interact regularly with their constituencies.
- Members have or learn the skills to recruit members, facilitate discussions and design meetings.
- Participants can rely on other groups, such as neighborhood associations or civic groups, to help them convene residents.
- Councils, boards and commissions have some regular, legitimate role in local policymaking.

Public Information Dissemination

Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure *BUILDING BLOCK 6 OF 12 - BUILDING SKILLS AND CAPACITY*

The screenshot shows the City of Phoenix website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Phone Directory, Mayor / City Council, Departments, and E-Services. A search bar and weather information (62°F Mostly Cloudy | 9:38 PM | Nov. 06, 2011) are also present. Below the navigation bar, there are several menu categories: Residents, Businesses, Visitors & Newcomers, Public Safety, Transportation, Culture & Recreation, City Government, Employment, and Environment & Sustainability. The main content area features a large banner with the text "Welcome to the City of Phoenix GOVERNMENT AT YOUR SERVICE" and a list of eServices including "Pay My Municipal Services Bill", "Pre-Register for a Library Card", "Building Permits / Inspections", "Search for Public Records", "Pay a Court Fine, Fee or Restitution", and "Pay & File Privilege (Sales) Tax Online". There are also sections for News & Events (e.g., "Last Day to Vote; Where to Find Election Results") and Features (e.g., "City Water Department Maintains AAA Credit Rating"). A featured video section is visible, along with several promotional banners for the 2011 Runoff Election, Phoenix Shines photo gallery, Sunshine Review (Top Transparency Website in 2011), and Innovation & Efficiency.

Transparency and Responsiveness Online

Arvada, Colorado (pop. 106,000)
Contact: Chris Longshore, Information Systems Manager,
(720) 898-7870, clongshore@arvada.org,
www.arvada.org

Arvada's e-government services provide 24/7 access to City Hall. Citizens are able to communicate with local government through their choice of medium: phone, website, social media or mobile applications. An array of Web 2.0 tools are in use, and the city has its own YouTube channel. To ensure transparent and user-friendly systems, the city convened citizens, employees, elected officials and others to help design the website and services. The most widely used feature on the site is ASK Arvada, a tool that allows citizens to either search for answers in a large FAQ database or to request services through the web that are routed automatically to the proper department for resolution. Many public meetings can be accessed through podcasts or streaming video. There is a community partner directory that lists service companies, businesses, faith institutions and other organizations; a unique feature of the directory is that residents are able to post comments about services they received from the businesses and organizations. Juggle.com, an online encyclopaedia and reference resource, recently gave Arvada.org its Top Local Government Website Award for its outstanding online advocacy of local businesses and community.

Citizens are bombarded with information daily, making it difficult to keep them updated on key issues. Making government more transparent by allowing greater access to public data is an important step, but it is likely to be inadequate by itself. Using social media tools, communities can give citizens the chance to identify their interests and customize the announcements and information they receive. Using more interactive tools — like “serious games,” budget simulators and online land use visualization tools — cities can make the raw information more compelling and help people to absorb and assess it.

PRIORITIES TO ADDRESS:

- Inform and educate citizens.
- Support other components.

POTENTIAL ACTIONS:

- Create customizable online public information systems that allow citizens to sign up for updates on issues and services that interest them.
- Make more government records available online.
- Create “serious games” that educate citizens on public issues and services.
- Create online budget simulators that allow citizens to see the implications of different spending and revenue options.
- Use barcode technology to provide information on public buildings, parks and other facilities.
- Ensure that key information — especially about how people can get involved — is available in the different languages spoken in the community.

WORK BEST WHEN:

- They build on, and connect to, neighborhood associations and other groups that are intended to be more permanent hubs for public life.
- They serve as an “early warning system” that will help bring citizens to the table at a point in the policymaking process when their participation will be more strategic and influential.
- They alert people to face-to-face and online opportunities to submit questions, comments and ideas on public issues.

Engagement Skills Training

Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure *BUILDING BLOCK 7 OF 12 - BUILDING SKILLS AND CAPACITY*



To be successful, most of the building blocks described in this guide require that the people developing and staffing them have certain skills. In many cities, the engagement “skill base” is not deep enough to meet this challenge. In other places, the skills are there but so diffused throughout the community that it isn’t easy to find the people you need — for example, it may be difficult to assemble an adequate supply of experienced facilitators. Within City Hall, these capacities are sometimes limited to a small cadre of public employees working out of departments for neighborhood services or human relations.

Cultures of Engagement

Sacramento, California (pop. 486,000)
Contact: Karen Maxwell, Assistant Chief Deputy District Attorney, 916-874-5834, maxwellk@sacda.org, www.sacda.org/community/ca/ca.php

Since 2006, the Sacramento police department has used both its police citizens’ academy and a separate cultural community academy to engage and support its diverse non-English speaking population. The department used community liaisons and faith-based leaders to recruit participants; roughly 50 people attended each of the six-week cultural academies. Simultaneous translation was provided for languages other than English. While the cultural academies have been discontinued due to budget cuts, the police citizens’ academy now incorporates some of the same topics, including Multicultural Sensitivity in the Criminal Justice System, Race as a Factor in the Criminal Justice System and Perceptions of Disparate Treatment in the Criminal Justice System. As a result of these programs, volunteerism has increased from non-English speaking groups, and there has been some success in recruiting officers from this diverse community. More than 450 residents have participated in both academies.

PRIORITIES TO ADDRESS:

- Inform and educate citizens.
- Tap the power of citizens as problem-solvers.
- Support other components.

RELEVANT SKILLS:

- Recruitment
- Facilitation
- Issue framing
- Meeting design
- Crowdsourcing
- Volunteer management
- Social media management and aggregation
- Online forum moderation
- Asset mapping
- GPS-based problem-solving
- Participatory budgeting
- Serious games
- Action planning

TRAINING PROGRAMS WORK BEST WHEN:

- They are provided as part of an ongoing citizen's academy or some other regularly occurring program that can train large numbers of people over time.
- Participants are recruited proactively, with a special emphasis on reaching segments of the community that have historically been marginalized or under-represented.
- The curricula and content are publicly available online, and in the different languages spoken in the community.
- Citizens, public officials and public employees take part in the trainings together (sometimes as trainers, sometimes as trainees) so that they learn the same skills and build relationships with the other participants.

Ambassadors for the City

Ambassadors for the City
Troy, Michigan (pop. 80,900)
Contact: Cynthia A. Stewart, Community Affairs Director,
Cindy.Stewart@troymi.gov

Troy's Citizens' Academy is designed to give citizens the tools and resources they need to encourage civic participation and become "City Ambassadors." A number of city departments are involved in the sessions, which include site visits to the Department of Public Works, Police and Fire Departments, Library, Troy Museum and Parks & Recreation. Launched in 2001, the eight-week course incorporates hands-on activities and live demonstrations by city staff. Of the more than 200 graduates, over 50 percent have applied to work on volunteer boards and committees, or become volunteers with community organizations. Several participants have also run for city council. Graduates have served in focus groups to provide feedback about issues in the community. Participants in the Citizens Academy are proactively recruited, so that the group is a representative cross section of citizens.

Tracking, Measurement and Technical Assistance to Improve Engagement

Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure *BUILDING BLOCK 8 OF 12 - BUILDING SKILLS AND CAPACITY*



Assessment to Improve Engagement

Portland, Oregon (pop. 583,000)
Contact: Paul Leistner
(503) 823-5284, Paul.Leistner@portlandoregon.gov,
<http://www.portlandonline.com/oni/index.cfm?c=28381>

To be successful in democratic governance, cities need to be able to adapt on the fly, bring in experienced advisors when needed and learn from what is working — and what isn't. These traits aren't usually "planned in" to the way communities approach this work, but they could be. Tracking process data like turnout, demographics and participant satisfaction, and making that information publicly available online, can help organizers and participants measure the quality of engagement efforts and decide how to improve them. Most cities don't gather this information, and most lack a well-known and easy-to-access cadre of experienced practitioners who can provide advice and technical assistance to people in different organizations who are working to engage the public.

The City of Portland maintains a performance measurement system for the city's system of neighborhood associations and district coalition offices. It tracks some of the basic factors in neighborhood organizing, including the number of people attending meetings and events, the frequency and kind of communications going out to residents and partnerships with other community groups. The city auditor also administers an annual community survey that includes questions about public participation and whether residents feel they can have an effect on decision-making. Finally, the city's Public Involvement Advisory Council, an ongoing formal body that is comprised of city staff and community members, has begun to play a proactive role in evaluating public involvement by city officials and staff, and suggesting improvements.

PRIORITIES TO ADDRESS:

- Tap the power of citizens as problem-solvers.
- Support other components.

POTENTIAL ACTIONS:

- Formulate a set of indicators and benchmarks that can be used to track and measure engagement processes.
- Create an online dashboard for each process, or for the community as a whole, using engagement indicators.
- Organize a cadre of experienced practitioners who can offer advice and guidance to engagement efforts.

WORK BEST WHEN:

- They enlist citizens in providing some of the data on engagement efforts, and helping to analyze the results.
- The information being gathered includes data on the race, gender, age and income level of participants, so that it is possible to see whether participants in meetings or other engagement opportunities are representative of the broader community.
- There is some sort of city-wide body whose job it is to monitor and support this continual reporting and assessment process.

Official Public Meetings That are More Participatory and Effective

Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure

BUILDING BLOCK 9 OF 12 - IMPROVING PUBLIC DECISION-MAKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING



The official proceedings of city councils, school boards, zoning committees and other decision-making bodies usually have highly regimented agendas and formats. Citizens sometimes have an opportunity to voice their opinions, but these are usually during “open mic” sessions, which tend to maximize conflict and frustration for both citizens and city leaders. Officials and citizens alike tend to value exchanges that are less tense, more interactive and more productive.

Thinking and Meeting Out of the Box

Austin, Texas (pop. 790,000)

Contact: Mark Walters, Neighborhood Planning and Zoning

(512) 974-7695, Mark.Walters@ci.austin.tx.us, www.ImagineAustin.net

Austin has recognized the limitations of traditional public meetings, and has moved beyond a one-size-fits-all approach to public involvement. The city maintains a robust presence on Facebook and Twitter, using Facebook posts and Twitter hash tags to entice followers to contribute input on decision-making. All community meetings are televised live, and questions and comments can be contributed via voicemail, text message and instant message. To communicate to participants on how their input affected the decision, the city collects e-mail addresses and phone numbers at every meeting and sends out notes, next meeting information and information on final decisions, with an indication of how public input influenced that decision. For its Imagine Austin planning process, the city supported productive public discussions on development issues by creating a Meeting-in-a-Box. Over the last two years, hundreds of residents have used this tool to hold their own community conversations. The Meeting-in-a-Box helps individuals organize small meetings of five-to-eight participants to learn about and respond to the vision plan for the city. Materials include a host guide, vision statement, development information, discussion components and themes, individual feedback sheets, a community design poster and a self-addressed return envelope. Results of the community conversations have been compiled and are on display in various locations around the city.

PRIORITIES TO ADDRESS:

- Build a stronger sense of community.
- Reduce tension around controversial issues.
- Develop smarter, more widely supported policies.
- Give marginalized voices a place at the table.

POTENTIAL ACTIONS:

- Use more participatory formats for city council, school board, zoning committee and other city meetings (for example, replace “open mic” segments with small-group breakouts, Open Space, Twitterfalls or other interactive exercises).
- Hold official meetings in places other than the traditional downtown locations.
- Supplement official meetings with separate deliberative processes, either online or face-to-face.

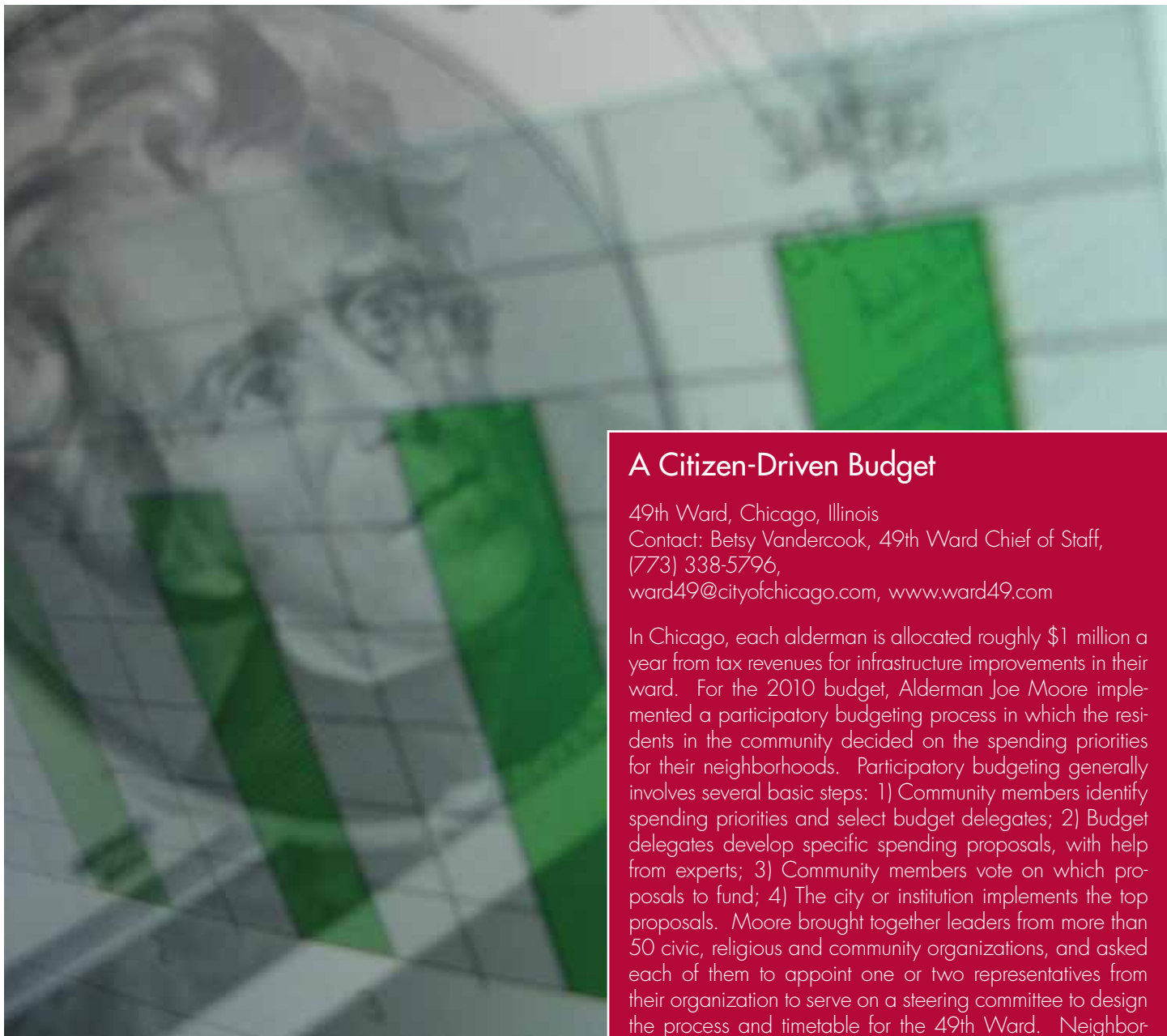
WORK BEST WHEN:

- They use online tools to allow citizens to post questions, comments and ideas before and between meetings.
- There are well-established lines of communication between official bodies and the citizen spaces in neighborhoods, schools and online settings.
- Officials report back clearly and regularly — in both online and face-to-face settings — on what they have heard from residents and how that input was incorporated into policy.

Recurring Deliberative Processes on Key Issues and Decisions

Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure

BUILDING BLOCK 10 OF 12 - IMPROVING PUBLIC DECISION-MAKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING



A Citizen-Driven Budget

49th Ward, Chicago, Illinois
Contact: Betsy Vandercook, 49th Ward Chief of Staff,
(773) 338-5796,
ward49@cityofchicago.com, www.ward49.com

In Chicago, each alderman is allocated roughly \$1 million a year from tax revenues for infrastructure improvements in their ward. For the 2010 budget, Alderman Joe Moore implemented a participatory budgeting process in which the residents in the community decided on the spending priorities for their neighborhoods. Participatory budgeting generally involves several basic steps: 1) Community members identify spending priorities and select budget delegates; 2) Budget delegates develop specific spending proposals, with help from experts; 3) Community members vote on which proposals to fund; 4) The city or institution implements the top proposals. Moore brought together leaders from more than 50 civic, religious and community organizations, and asked each of them to appoint one or two representatives from their organization to serve on a steering committee to design the process and timetable for the 49th Ward. Neighborhood assemblies were held where information and ideas were exchanged. Meetings were conducted in Spanish as well as English. Thirty-six individual proposals appeared on the ballot. Each voter was entitled to vote for up to eight projects. More than 1,600 residents voted in the election for infrastructure spending priorities in April 2010. The project proposals that garnered the most votes were submitted to the City of Chicago and its sister agencies for implementation. The participatory budget process has since been used to develop the 2011 infrastructure priorities in the 49th Ward, and a number of other Chicago aldermen have pledged to launch similar processes in their wards.

In many cities, local officials and other leaders have been able to address key issues and policy decisions by engaging large numbers of people in small deliberative groups. These efforts typically involve hundreds of people, each of whom devotes several hours of their time (sometimes over several weeks, sometimes in one day). Participants consider a range of policy options and have the chance to make up their own minds about what should be done. These processes can be embedded into the way the community engages citizens and makes decisions in different issue areas.

PRIORITIES TO ADDRESS:

- Inform and educate citizens.
- Build a stronger sense of community.
- Reduce tension around controversial issues.
- Tap the power of citizens as problem-solvers.
- Develop smarter, more widely supported policies.
- Give marginalized voices a place at the table.

POTENTIAL ACTIONS:

- Institute an annual Participatory Budgeting process.
- Mount large-scale community visioning processes at regular intervals.
- Establish an annual large-scale deliberative process, using face-to-face and online tools, on the top issue of the year.
- Incorporate deliberative processes in how high-profile land use decisions are made at the local and neighborhood levels.
- Establish regular deliberations on issues of race, diversity and difference in neighborhoods, workplaces and other settings.
- Develop a procedure for using citizen juries, citizen panels or other representative sample approaches on more specific or technical issues.

WORK BEST WHEN:

- Participants are recruited proactively, with a special emphasis on reaching segments of the community that have historically been marginalized or under-represented.
- They use online tools to allow citizens to post questions, comments and ideas before and between meetings.
- They are repeated as part of the regular policymaking routine on a particular issue.
- They are connected to citizen spaces in neighborhoods, schools and online settings.
- Officials report back clearly — both online and in face-to-face settings — on what they have heard from residents and how that input was incorporated into policy.

Systems that Encourage Innovation by Citizens

Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure

BUILDING BLOCK 11 OF 12 - IMPROVING PUBLIC DECISION-MAKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING

Wikis and “crowdsourcing” are two of the most commonly used online tools for gathering citizen input. Both methods allow people to propose ideas and work together to refine and prioritize them. Some cities are building these kinds of tools into the way they govern, partly by providing incentives for people to participate. A few cities have even created local currencies that citizens can exchange and redeem for prizes or services.

Building Bonds in the Local Economy

Macon, Georgia (pop. 91,000)

Contacts: Kevin Slavin, Chairman and co-Founder of Area/Code, (212) 254-5800, contact@areacodeinc.com;
Marc Fest, Vice President of Communications at Knight Foundation, (305) 908-2677, fest@knightfoundation.org, www.maconmoney.org/

“Macon Money” is a social networking game that builds person to person connections throughout the community while supporting local businesses. It was developed by Area/Code Entertainment and funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. The game was introduced to Macon in October 2010 and completed in June 2011. Before the game started, \$65,000 worth of Macon Money was printed and distributed to residents of Macon. Each player got half a “bond” and to turn it in had to find a person holding a matching half. To find their match, players could use social media, online message boards, the Macon Money website, face-to-face events and any other appropriate ways. After a player found his match he and his “partner” decided how and where to spend their Macon Money. The total value of issued bonds was higher than the total value of Macon Money. Therefore, the players had to act fast before the organizers ran out of the money. After finding the other half of their bond and cashing it in, participants could request one more half bond and play again. Forty-one local participating businesses accepted Macon Money bills from more than 2,600 winners and redeemed them for U.S. dollars. Businesses of different kinds, including shoes and apparel, food and drink, entertainment and services, benefited from the new customers who were spending money locally. Macon Money won the 2011 FutureEverything Award for outstanding innovation in art, society and technology. Through real-world rewards, Macon Money brought together more than 3,000 diverse local residents, created social bonds, positively impacted local businesses and entertained people who lived in and visited the community.



PRIORITIES TO ADDRESS:

- Develop smarter, more widely supported policies.
- Tap the power of citizens as problem-solvers.

POTENTIAL ACTIONS:

- Use online crowdsourcing to harvest and prioritize ideas for making progress on a particular issue, or for improving a public service.
- Use wikis to involve people in creating a shared document or plan.
- Create a local currency and use it to reward citizens for generating ideas or making other contributions to problem-solving.

WORK BEST WHEN:

- Participants are recruited proactively, with a special emphasis on reaching segments of the community that have historically been marginalized or under-represented.
- They are incorporated into the regular policymaking routines on particular issues.
- They are connected to official public meetings and face-to-face deliberative processes on key issues.
- They are connected to citizen spaces in neighborhoods, schools and online settings.

Cross-Sector Problem-Solving Teams

Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure

BUILDING BLOCK 12 OF 12 - IMPROVING PUBLIC DECISION-MAKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING



Citizen Ideas, Citizen Effort

New York, New York (pop. 8,100,000)
Contact: Saleen Shah, Citizens Committee for New York City, (212) 822-9566, sshah@citizensnyc.org, <http://nycblog.changeby.us/>

“Change by Us NYC” is a new website created by Local Projects and CEOs for Cities, and run by the City of New York. It’s a place for New Yorkers to put their ideas into action by creating projects and building teams to make the city a better place to live. It is supported by the Rockefeller Foundation, the Knight Foundation and the Case Foundation. New Yorkers can use the site to suggest ideas for improving their neighborhoods, find organizations or action teams they can join, build a new action team to work on an idea and get information and support from city staff and other experts. Launched in July 2011, Change by Us NYC already has 1,200 active members and 190 projects underway. Small grants are available for composting, tree and park stewardship and community gardening and agriculture projects.

Communities have many potential problem-solvers, working inside and outside government. Usually these people are disconnected from one another, and unaware of how they might work together. Some cities have restructured the way City Hall works to make it easier for citizens and city employees to collaborate. Other communities are establishing online processes that connect people who want to work on similar ideas.

PRIORITIES TO ADDRESS:

- Build a stronger sense of community.
- Tap the power of citizens as problem-solvers.
- Give marginalized voices a place at the table.

POTENTIAL ACTIONS:

- Form inter-departmental teams within City Hall — or cross-sector teams including representatives from local government, school systems and other organizations — and assign them to work with different neighborhoods.
- Establish online GPS-based systems that allow citizens to identify problems such as potholes and graffiti.
- Provide online workspaces for small groups of citizens and public employees.
- Create online processes that allow citizens to formulate ideas and then assemble in teams to implement them.

WORK BEST WHEN:

- Teams receive some basic level of support and assistance.
- Teams receive recognition for their achievements.
- Participants are recruited proactively, with a special emphasis on reaching segments of the community that have historically been marginalized or under-represented.
- They are incorporated into the regular policymaking routines on particular issues.
- They are connected to official public meetings and face-to-face deliberative processes on key issues.
- They are connected to citizen spaces in neighborhoods, schools and online settings.

Appendix 1: Using this Guide to Create Planning Meeting Agendas

Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure

AGENDA 1: MAKING CONNECTIONS AND SETTING GOALS

To make the conversation as productive and meaningful as possible, it is important to limit the number of people in each discussion. If there are more than ten people attending the meeting, divide the participants randomly into smaller groups (6-8 participants in each discussion works best).

Tips for the Facilitator

- Welcome everyone.
- Explain that you will be facilitating the discussion — not joining in with your own opinions.
- The meeting is divided into four parts — use the time suggested for each as a guide.
- Ask the recorder to try to capture only the main ideas from the session — use the sample recording form as a guide.

PART 1 – GROUND RULES AND INTRODUCTIONS (ALLOW 15 MINUTES)

Using ground rules in a planning meeting may seem overly formal, but it models one of the key process techniques of successful public engagement. Here are some potential ground rules:

- Respect other people, their ideas and opinions.
- Do not interrupt others.
- Try to say it in two minutes or less.
- Speak only to the topic at hand.
- Everyone gets a chance to speak.
- No side conversations; turn off cellphones.
- Personal stories stay in the group.
- Speak for yourself, not for others.
- It's OK to disagree, but don't make it personal.
- These are everybody's rules and everyone is responsible for seeing that they are followed.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. (For the whole group) Do any of these ground rules seem helpful? Are there others you would add?
2. Introductions (For each participant in the group, in turn: 2-3 minutes each)
 - Introduce yourself to the group. Tell the group a little about where you grew up.
 - How long have you lived in this community, and how did you come to live here?

PART 2 – REVIEWING THE STATE OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN YOUR COMMUNITY (45 MINUTES)

Before deciding how to move forward, it is important to understand how public engagement is working today, and to get people's perceptions of those efforts.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you have any reactions to the information that has been provided on past public engagement efforts — anything that surprised you...or particularly interested you...or confirmed what you already knew?
2. What are the strengths of the public engagement work that has been done so far? What are the weaknesses or limitations?
3. What more do we need to know to get a better sense of the community?

PART 3 – CONSIDERING DIFFERENT PRIORITIES FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT (45 MINUTES)

In planning for public engagement, it is important to think carefully about everyone's interests and goals. Why is it beneficial for the community to have people involved in public life? Why is it beneficial for people to be involved? One common mistake is to focus on the engagement goals of public managers, and not take into account why citizens might want to be engaged.

Take a look at Potential Priorities for Democratic Governance in your Community.

FOR EACH PRIORITY ON THE LIST, ASK:

- Does this priority seem important to you?
- How are we doing on this priority right now? Are there any practices or structures in place that help us achieve it?

FINALLY, DISCUSS:

- Are there other important priorities that aren't on the list?
- Which of these priorities is most important to government? Which is most important to citizens?

PART 4 – WRAPPING UP AND LOOKING FORWARD TO THE NEXT MEETING (15 MINUTES)

QUESTIONS FOR SUMMARIZING THE DISCUSSION:

1. [Ask the recorder for a very brief summary of the main ideas from the meeting] Does this summary seem about right?
2. Were there any other insights or ideas that seem particularly important?
3. The next meeting will focus on developing a shared strategy for public engagement. What do you think will be important to think about, or find out more about, in preparation for that session?

Tips for the Facilitator

- If there was more than one small-group discussion in the meeting, ask a representative from each group to give a quick recap of their discussion, particularly the top goals of their group.
- Ask for questions or comments from the other group(s).

BETWEEN THE FIRST AND SECOND MEETINGS: POTENTIAL ONLINE ACTIVITIES

After the first meeting, there are a number of ways you might use online tools to broaden and deepen the planning effort. Here are some possibilities:

- Create a listserv or simple discussion for the meeting participants and encourage them to continue their discussion online.
- Post the notes from the first meeting (without violating the privacy ground rules set by the group) on a public online forum and invite comments and contributions.
- Post the list of participants from the first meeting and invite suggestions for additional people and groups that should be invited into the process.

AGENDA 2: DEVELOPING A SHARED PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE

The purpose of this meeting is to begin developing a shared strategy that reflects the priorities discussion in the last session. If you had more than one small group at the previous meeting, it will work best if the groups remain together for this session.

PART 1 – EXPLORING DIFFERENT COMPONENTS OF A PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE (60 MINUTES)

Take a look at the 12 building blocks for local civic infrastructure of this guide.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you have experience with any of the building blocks listed here? Do the descriptions and bullets reflect your experiences?
2. Are there other strategies, not listed here, that might be useful?
3. Think about the priorities that seemed most important to you in the last meeting. Which of these strategies seem to be the best fit for those priorities?

Tips for the Facilitator

- Review the ground rules from the previous meeting, and ask if the group wants to change or add to the list.
- The meeting is divided into four parts — use the time suggested for each as a guide.

PART 2 – WORKING TOGETHER TO STRENGTHEN PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT (45 MINUTES)

There are no “cookie cutter” recipes for public engagement infrastructure: every community should come up with ideas and plans that fit their needs and goals. To help people think creatively, divide the group into twos or threes for the next 30 minutes.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR EACH GROUP OF 2-3 PEOPLE:

1. Which strategies seem most valuable to you? How might they be modified or strengthened to fit the goals that seem most important?
2. How might these strategies be combined, or used together as part of an overall plan?
3. How can the burdens and tasks of this plan be shared among different groups and organizations?

PART 3 – WRAPPING UP THE DISCUSSION (15 MINUTES)

QUESTIONS FOR SUMMARIZING THE DISCUSSION:

1. What are you taking away from these meetings?
2. What opportunities do you see for strengthening public engagement in this community?
3. Would you be willing to help contribute to public engagement efforts that come out of these meetings?
4. Who else needs to be at the table? What other groups should be represented in discussions about how to move forward on these issues?

Tips for the Facilitator

- Bring everyone back together for the final 30 minutes.
- Ask each group of 2-3 people to give a five-minute report on what they've come up with.
- Keep time carefully – give each presenter a one-minute warning.

Appendix 2: Changing Roles in Democratic Governance

Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure

QUESTIONS ABOUT ENGAGING THE PUBLIC	TRADITIONAL CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT	DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE
Who is responsible for solving public problems?	Governments	Whole community — governments, citizens, businesses, community organizations of all kinds
What are the criteria for “good government?”	Openness and efficiency	Ability to work with the public — identifying priorities, marshalling a variety of resources, achieving tangible changes, and reporting on your progress
How should governments recruit citizens?	Public officials call meetings, use media for outreach	Proactive, network-based recruitment by governments and other groups, reaching large numbers and different kinds of people
How should issues be discussed?	Public officials “sell” the policy they support; citizens decide whether to buy	Basic background information provided, range of views laid on the table; chance to connect personal experience to policy debate
How should government treat citizen self-interest?	Citizen self-interest is static; we can’t expect people to change their minds	Citizen interests are malleable, and can be changed through information, exposure to others with different views
What is the civic duty of the average citizen?	Stay informed, vote, and obey the law	Become more informed, take part in dialogue, make decisions, take action
When should citizens be involved in public life?	Whenever there is a crisis, a big decision to be made, or some other specific reason	All the time — when there is a range of reasons to participate, people stay involved
Who governs?	Public officials, in the name of the electorate	Public officials, public employees, community organizations, citizens — all with roles and responsibilities that are distinct but complementary

Resources

NLC PUBLICATIONS

BEYOND CIVILITY: FROM PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT TO PROBLEM SOLVING (2011)

The action guide assists local elected officials in creating a framework for civility and democratic governance that encourages governing a community in a participatory, deliberative, inclusive and collaborative ways.

LOCAL PRACTICES IN PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT (2010)

This brief presents local practices that public officials and their staffs are incorporating in their communities to govern in more participatory, deliberative, inclusive and collaborative ways.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND RECENT IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES (2010)

This guide presents local officials with the first steps and directions for developing or re-establishing efforts toward integrating immigrants into the civic life of the city. It provides guidance for conducting meetings with small groups of local leaders that are representative of the many cultural and ethnic facets of the community. It includes suggested agendas, background materials, planning considerations, and successful formats for civic engagement.

MUNICIPAL INNOVATIONS IN IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION: 20 CITIES, 20 GOOD PRACTICES (2010)

This publication describes local efforts to promote immigrant integration in a variety of ways. Small, medium-sized, and large cities are included to represent a range of possibilities.

AUTHENTIC YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: A GUIDE FOR MUNICIPAL LEADERS (2010)

This guide offers a framework to support cities as they work to promote youth civic engagement in their communities

LEGISLATING FOR RESULTS (2009)

NLC and the Urban Institute (UI), under the guidance of a local elected official advisory committee, launched a project aimed at providing a set of “Municipal Action Guides” as a guide to results-based legislating for local government. The eleven Action Guides represent key concepts related to gathering, analyzing, using, and communicating information in order to “legislate for results.”

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

THE PROMISE AND CHALLENGE OF NEIGHBORHOOD DEMOCRACY: LESSONS FROM THE INTERSECTION OF GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY (2008)

This report focuses of the Neighborhood structures of Portland, Minneapolis, Los Angeles and other cities that have experimented with creative ways to engage citizens in public decision making and problem solving.

RESOURCE GUIDE ON PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT (2010)

This guide showcases the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation’s directory of valuable resources, points of contact, and case studies of collaborations from communities across the country.

Paul Leistner and Amalia Alarcon de Morris, “From Neighborhood Association System to Participatory Democracy: Broadening and Deepening Public Involvement in Portland, Oregon,” National Civic Review, 2009. : <http://www.portlandonline.com/oni/index.cfm?a=267614&c=29385>

This article provides background on Portland’s community engagement system, describes the system assessment and new programs, and presents lessons learned.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF PUBLIC HEARINGS

This pamphlet provides practical ideas for making public hearings more effective forums for participants and public officials. (www.ca-ilg.org/publichearings)

PEW CENTER RESEARCH REPORT: GOVERNMENT ONLINE

The report prepared by the Pew’s Research Center Internet & American Life Project evaluates the current state of online government.

WEBSITES

SOUL OF THE COMMUNITY PROJECT, WWW.SOULOFTHECOMMUNITY.ORG

Soul of the Community (SOTC) is a three-year study conducted by Gallup of the 26 John S. and James L. Knight Foundation communities across the United States to determine the factors that attach residents to their communities and the role of community attachment in an area’s economic growth and well-being.

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

AMERICA SPEAKS: WWW.AMICASPEAKS.ORG

America speaks is a nonprofit organization that engages citizens in public decisions using innovative deliberative tools including large-scale town halls supported by keypad polling, groupware computers, and interactive television

ASCENTUM: WWW.ASCENTUM.CA

Ascentum fosters local democracy by helping entire communities come together to work through tough issues and answer questions that matter to them. Using a complementary mix of online and face-to-face tools, Ascentum allows foundations to foster dialogue across whole communities, including a broad range of interested and affected citizens, as well as local stakeholders. Ascentum's unique process is supported by its innovative, dialoguescircles.com platform – a suite of face-to-face and online tools to support deliberative democracy.

ASH CENTER FOR DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND INNOVATION: WWW.ASH.HARVARD.EDU

The Roy and Lila Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation advances excellence and innovation in governance and public policy through research, education, and public discussion. The three major programs that support the mission of the center are: the Program on Democratic Governance which researches those practices that resolve urgent social problems in developed and developing societies; the Innovations in Government Program recognizes and promotes creative and effective problem solving by governments and citizens; and the Rajawali Foundation Institute for Asia promotes research and training on Asia to disseminate best practices and improve public

DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY CONSORTIUM: WWW.DELIBERATIVE-DEMOCRACY.NET

The Deliberative Democracy Consortium (DDC) is a network of practitioners and researchers representing more than 50 organizations and universities, collaborating to strengthen the field of deliberative democracy. The Consortium seeks to support research activities and to advance practice at all levels of government, in North America and around the world.

E-DEMOCRACY.ORG: WWW.E-DEMOCRACY.ORG

Launched as the world's first election information website in 1994, today E-democracy.org focuses on hosting local online Issues Forums. E-democracy provides a service-club-like infrastructure for local volunteers (and partners) using a shared, low-cost technology base and, more importantly, a universal set of civility rules and facilitation guides that help communities succeed with online engagement.

EVERYDAY DEMOCRACY: WWW.EVERYDAY-DEMOCRACY.ORG

Everyday Democracy is dedicated to finding way for people to engage in dialogue and problem solving on critical social and political issues. The organization helps communities by giving them the tools to organize productive dialogue, recruit diverse participants, find solutions, and work for action and change.

INSTITUTE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT: WWW.CA-ILG.ORG

The Institute for Local government is the nonprofit research and education affiliate of the League of California Cities. The Institute has established a Collaborative Governance Initiative to support informed and effective civic engagement in public decision-making and to assist local officials in California to navigate successfully among the growing number of community engagement options that bring the public's voice to the table on important issues.

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: WWW.IAP2.ORG

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is an association of members who seek to promote and improve the practice of public participation and other entities that affect the public interest in nationals throughout the world.

INTERNATIONAL CITY/ COUNTY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION: WWW.ICMA.ORG

ICMA is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to create excellence in local governance by advocating and developing the professional management of local government worldwide. ICMA provides publications, data, information, technical assistance, and training and professional development.

KETTERING FOUNDATION: WWW.KETTERING.ORG

The Kettering Foundation, established in 1927 by inventor Charles F. Kettering, is a nonprofit operating foundation that does not make grants but engages in joint research with others. Kettering's primary research question is, what does it take to make democracy work as it should? Kettering's research is distinctive because it is conducted from the perspective of citizens and focuses on what people can do collectively to address problems affecting their lives, their communities, and their nation. The foundation seeks to identify and address the challenges to making democracy work as it should through interrelated program areas that focus on citizens, communities, and institutions. The foundation collaborates with an extensive network of community groups, professional associations, researchers, scholars, and citizens around the world.

[KEYSTONE CENTER: WWW.KEYSTONE.ORG](http://WWW.KEYSTONE.ORG)

The Keystone Center brings together public, private, and civic sector leaders to confront critical environment, energy, and public health problems. In conjunction with working on issues in the policy domain, the Keystone Center also uses its educational programs to arm the next generation of leaders with the 21st Century intellectual and social skills they will require to solve the problems they will face.

[NATIONAL COALITION FOR DIALOGUE & DELIBERATION: WWW.NCDD.ORG](http://WWW.NCDD.ORG)

The National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD) actively promotes learning and collaboration among practitioners, public leaders, scholars and organizations involved in dialogue, deliberation, and other innovative group processes that help people tackle our most challenging problems. The NCDD website offers many resources and best practices.

[NATIONAL CIVIC LEAGUE: WWW.NCL.ORG](http://WWW.NCL.ORG)

The National Civic League (NCL) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization dedicated to strengthening citizen democracy by transforming democratic institutions. NCL fosters innovative community building and political reform, assists local governments, and recognizes collaborative community achievement.

[ORTON FAMILY FOUNDATION: WWW.ORTON.ORG](http://WWW.ORTON.ORG)

Orton Family Foundation, an operating foundation, has worked since 1995 to develop new tools and processes to better engage citizens and help small cities and towns plan their development futures. This work includes the creation of CommunityViz[®], an innovative GIS planning software, development of community video and place-based education programs, and most recently the launch of its “heart and soul community planning” initiative, which brings story gathering, value mapping, scenario planning, and other high tech and low tech tools to provide citizens a stronger, better informed voice and more effective involvement and leadership in steering the change of their communities.

[PUBLIC AGENDA: WWW.PUBLICAGENDA.ORG](http://WWW.PUBLICAGENDA.ORG)

Public Agenda is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization founded by Daniel Yankelovich to help America leaders better understand the public’s point of view and to help citizens know more about critical policy issues so they can make thoughtful, informed decisions. Public Agenda conducts policy research that frames issues, using polling and focus group methods.

[PUBLIC CONVERSATIONS PROJECT: WWW.PUBLICCONVERSATIONS.ORG](http://WWW.PUBLICCONVERSATIONS.ORG)

The Public Conversations Project is a nonprofit organization that fosters a more inclusive, empathic and collaborative society by promoting constructive conversations and relationships among those who have differing values, worldviews, and positions about divisive public issues.

