

A close-up photograph of a bee pollinating a purple flower cluster. The flowers are small, tubular, and light purple, growing in a dense, spherical cluster. A bumblebee is visible, its dark body covered in yellow pollen, as it feeds on the flowers. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting a natural outdoor setting.

Community Engagement Toolkit

July 2013

 sparc bc
people. planning. positive change.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

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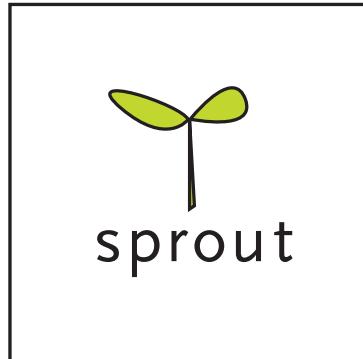
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resources for social change

As SPARC BC's ongoing knowledge transfer initiative, Sprout resources are designed to facilitate learning about and the practice of community-based research methods, local planning and community development strategies.

Sprout is a symbol of growth and innovation and can be found on all SPARC BC resource guides and workbooks that have been developed for you to use with groups of committed people who care about community well being.

By nature, Sprout resources are fusions of theory and practice — mixtures of big ideas and small steps for cultivating positive change in your community.

Each year, we will add new publications to Sprout based on your input. Let us know what you would like to see in Sprout!

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Abstract

The Community Engagement Toolkit offers an adaptable approach to designing a community engagement process tailored to specific issues and/or developments in your community.

The five (5) steps of effective community engagement planning are outlined in this document along with forty-seven (47) community engagement methods. A diverse range of examples are provided throughout this toolkit in an effort to demonstrate community engagement methods in action.

This toolkit was designed for municipal social planners and other municipal planning staff that are thinking about how to design and implement a community engagement process that is inclusive, accessible and results-oriented.

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Introduction

This Community Engagement Toolkit provides advice to municipalities in the design and implementation of a community engagement process.

Most of the tools outlined in the toolkit are presented in a way that speaks to municipal planning processes. However, the tools themselves can be used in a wide variety of contexts.

This document begins with a step-by-step outline that explains how to use this guide. This includes instruction in how to identify the most appropriate types of community engagement related to the issue in question.

A selection of community engagement methods is also reviewed. Two (2) worksheets for developing an engagement plan are also included in this document, as well as key considerations for implementation.

How to use this toolkit: Five steps

The key steps for using this toolkit are summarized below:

1. Step one: Assess level of community impact

- Use the assessment criteria that have been developed in this toolkit to determine the level of impact of the issue that you are seeking to address.

2. Step two: Identify appropriate types of community engagement

- Use the assessment criteria that have been developed in this toolkit to determine the general types of community engagement that would help to best address your issue.

3. Step three: Select specific community engagement methods

- Use the Community Engagement Matrix to determine the community engagement method or methods that are most appropriate for your issue.

4. Step four: Develop a community engagement plan

- Consider the determinants of successful community engagement processes and develop a community engagement plan. Use the provided planning worksheets to organize your thinking.

5. Step five: Implement community engagement plan

- Think about the specific results that you want to achieve and identify the key actions and roles required. Some resources are provided to determine your next steps and identify how to evaluate your success.

Step 1: Assess level of community impact

By the term 'level of community impact,' we are referring to the effect that a specific action or potential change will have in the community.

To determine the level of impact at which an issue and/or development is operative, it is advisable to work with your organization to identify the community groups and stakeholders that are or would be affected by the change in question.

On the following page, four (4) types of impact are defined. Beside each definition is a set of criteria that should be used to determine the level of impact of your issue.

1.1. Four levels of community impact and assessment criteria

Level of impact	Criteria	Examples
Level one: High impact on whole community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High impact across community including significant changes to the natural environment or the general health and safety of all residents • High degree of interest across community • Strong possibility of conflicting perspectives on the issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City council's strategic plan • Official community plan • Major zoning change • Elimination of a facility or service that serves the whole community
Level two: High impact on select area and/ or community group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High impact on a specific neighbourhood, group in the community or specific service or program • Strong possibility of conflicting perspectives at the neighbourhood level or the need for potential trade-offs among particular groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relocation of youth centre • Proposed changes to a cultural program • Removal of car parking lot
Level three: Modest impact on whole community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modest impact across the community • Sufficient degree of interest across the community to warrant public engagement • Moderate possibility for conflicting perspectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposed improvements to a community wide service, such as library services or garbage collection • Proposed improvements to customer services at community centers • Provision of a community wide event
Level four: Modest impact on select area and/or community group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modest impact on a neighbourhood area, community group(s) or specific facility or service • Small change to a localized facility or service • Modest risk of controversy or conflict at the local level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local street cleaning • Upgraded dilapidated sidewalks • Changes to a local youth activity program, such as timing or venue

Step 2: Identify appropriate types of community engagement

Once you have assessed the level of impact, your next step is to determine the appropriate type of community engagement. In the following pages, we present two (2) tables of information. The first table includes definitions and explanations related to three (3) different types of public engagement: communication, consultation and direct participation in decision-making.

In the second table, we offer a general review of the relationship between the different levels of impact and the different types of community engagement.

The information set out in this section is intended to help to identify the general types of community engagement that are most appropriate for your purposes. This information is set out on the Community Engagement Matrix in the following section with the focus of the matrix being on providing a useful tool for determining the specific public engagement methods that you should use for your situation.

2.1. Definitions of community engagement

There are many ways to define community engagement. Below, we outline three general types of community engagement that can relate to the activities of a municipal government.

Communication

Communication is the thread that ties together all types of community engagement. It is not possible to consult with or involve the public in decision-making processes unless they are first adequately informed about the matter at hand. Communications are fundamentally important because they serve as the first point of contact for the public and enable members of the public to gain an understanding of the services, issue and/or prospective development in question.

In municipal governance, communication efforts aim to transfer relevant information from the government to the public. The goal is to reach as many citizens as possible with as much of the information as possible, particularly those who are most likely to be affected. This is the most common form of engagement for municipal governments. Examples of common municipal government communication methods include: cable TV, radio, websites, email, newspaper ads, newsletters, hotlines, etc.

Consultation

Consultation is the process by which people, organizations, or governments seek the opinions, criticisms and suggestions of the community. Common consultation processes include communicative aspects and have as their focus bringing information from the public into the internal decision-making processes of the organization leading the consultation process. Common consultation processes include: focus groups, public meetings without voting, public hearings, public input sessions during council meetings, surveys, workshops, etc.

Consultation provides the means to test assumptions, invite new ideas, and give a broader view of an issue than planning and policy teams might otherwise be able to offer. The consultation process encourages thorough project planning, early input by stakeholders, and careful consideration of all available options.

Consultation is also effective in improving accountability of officials to the public, while encouraging public ownership over direction of municipal activities and developments that involve or impact them. This is because consultation builds public understanding and encourages public ownership of policies.

Participation in decision-making

Public participation in decision-making is an important mode of engagement and can lead to better decisions and outcomes. Some common examples of public participation in municipal decision-making include: Deliberative Polling, Citizens Juries, Participatory Budgeting, and Citizen Advisory Committees. The popular rationale for sharing decision-making power with the public is both pragmatic and normative.

The pragmatic rationale for public participation in decision-making recognizes that involving the public in decisions serves as a means to legitimate final decisions and improves public confidence and support for the decisions that are made. It also leads to mutual accountability, and awareness and understanding among and between decision makers and the public.

The normative argument suggests that public participation in local decision-making processes fosters pluralism and encourages an examination of issues from as many different perspectives as possible in order to find the best solution for everyone involved.

Public participation also fosters important democratic principles such as freedom of expression by providing local residents a space for sharing their ideas on matters that concern their lives.

2.2. Overview of relationships between level of community impact and type of community engagement

The table below shows the relationships between the different types of community engagement and potential impact. Use this table to ascertain the types of community engagement required to help address issues in your community.

Level of Impact	Type of Community Engagement
Level one: High impact on the whole community	In general, issues and/or developments that have an impact on the whole community require all three types of public engagement. Where the issues or development in question will have an enduring impact on the community, it may be necessary to form an ad hoc committee to ensure that any decision-making process involves the diverse perspectives in the community.
Level two: High impact on select area and/or community group	Where a development and/or issue has an impact in a particular area of the community or a group within the community, a combination of all three types of public engagement should be used. In some cases, it will be imperative to work with a local organization in order to ensure that the populations affected by the development and/or issue are given an adequate opportunity to offer their input on the matter at hand.
Level three: Modest impact on the whole community	In most cases, it is sufficient to inform and/or consult the public when dealing with an issue or development that falls in the Level three category of impact.
Level four: Modest impact on select area and/or community group	Similar to Level three, it is typically sufficient to inform and/or consult the public when dealing with an issue or development that falls in this category.

Step 3: Select community engagement methods

In this section we introduce a matrix, which is designed to guide decisions around the community engagement methods that are most appropriate for different levels of community impact.

Keep in mind that there is no perfect combination of methods for engaging the public. Also, it is likely that the type of engagement will vary from one project to the next. As such, be prepared to fit your approach into context and adapt your approach over time.

To use the Community Engagement Matrix:

1. Identify the level of impact that best defines your situation. You will note that the matrix includes information on the different types of expected impact.
2. Consider the symbols in the selected level of impact column and pick the methods that seem to best fit your situation.

Symbols have been affixed to each method as it relates to the level of impact in question.

The symbols that appear in the columns under each level of impact are intended to provide guidance on the type of engagement that is recommended.

1. **E = Essential** (this method is essential to effective public engagement for the level of impact expected of your situation);
2. **SR = Strongly Recommended** (this method is likely appropriate for your situation; however, there may be aspects of your initiative that would not benefit from the given method);
3. **O = Optional** (this method may or may not be useful for your situation).

The matrix includes forty-seven (47) different methods along with a description of each of the different methods offered in the sections following the matrix.

Choose the column on the matrix that best reflects your local circumstances and context.

3.1. Community Engagement Matrix

Community Engagement Methods	Level of impact			
	Green	Blue	Orange	Yellow
Communication methods	L1: High municipality - wide impact	L2: High area and/or group impact	L3: Modest municipality - wide impact	L4: Modest area and/or group impact
Ad in local publication (p.12)	E	SR	O	O
Notice on website (p.12)	E	E	E	O
Media release (p.13)	E	E	SR	O
Direct mail (p.14)	SR	SR	O	O
Staff briefing on messaging regarding local issues (p.14)	E	E	SR	SR
Briefing / issue note (p.14)	E	E	SR	SR
Notification sign (p.15)	E	E	SR	O
On-hold message - customized to topics as required (p.15)	O	O	O	O
Newsletter (p.16)	SR	SR	O	O
Display (p.16)	SR	O	O	O
Pamphlet / post card (p.17)	SR	SR	O	O
Personally addressed letter (p.17)	O	O	O	O
"Expert" commentary (p.18)	SR	SR	O	O
Billboard (p.18)	O	O	O	O
Radio ad (p.19)	O	O	O	O
TV ad (p.19)	O	O	O	O
Podcast (p.19)	O	O	O	O
Blog (p.20)	O	O	O	O
RSS feed (p.20)	SR	O	O	O
Tagging / tag cloud (p.21)	O	O	O	O
Wiki (p.21)	O	O	O	O
Banner ad on web (p.22)	SR	O	O	O

Email lists (p.22)	SR	O	O	O
Social networking / online community (p.23)	SR	SR	O	O
Consultation methods				
Workshop (p.23)	E	E	E	E
Public exhibition and the invitation of written submissions (p.24)	E	E	O	O
Survey (p.25)	O	O	O	O
Suggestion box (p.25)	O	O	O	O
Hotline/phone-in (p.26)	O	O	O	O
Public meeting (p.27)	E	SR	SR	O
Online forum (p.27)	SR	SR	SR	SR
Meeting with stakeholders (p.28)	E	SR	SR	SR
Focus group (p.29)	SR	SR	SR	SR
Site tour (p.29)	O	O	O	O
Dialogue (p.30)	SR	SR	O	O
SpeakOut (p.30)	O	O	O	O
Quick 1 question online poll (p.31)	O	O	O	O
Open space (p.31)	O	O	O	O
PlaceSpeak (p.31)	O	O	O	O
Charrette (p.32)	SR	SR	O	O
Community mapping (p.33)	O	O	O	O
Future Search conference (p.33)	O	O	O	O
Study circle (p.34)	SR	SR	O	O
Methods for public participation in decision-making				
Citizens Advisory Committees (p.34)	E	E	SR	SR
Citizens Jury (p.35)	SR	SR	O	O
Deliberative Polls (p.36)	SR	O	O	O
Participatory budgeting (p.37)	SR	O	O	O

3.2. Explanations of community engagement methods

The following section explains each of the community engagement methods listed in the Community Engagement Matrix. The following symbols correspond to the kinds of information provided under each method:

- ?- Explains what the method is
- ① - Explains how you can use the method
- ⇒ - Explains considerations to keep in mind when using the method
- ★ - Gives a real case example

3.2.1. Communication methods

Ad in local publication

- ?- A paid or free advertisement in a local publication such as a free community newspaper can give details about an event or municipal initiative. Ads can be placed in colour or black and white in various sizes.
- ① Ads reach virtually every household in the area as the local newspapers are delivered to each household and are also available for free in community centres, grocery stores and drop-in centres.
- ★ All municipalities publish ads regularly regarding notices about road closures, by-law changes, town hall meetings and more.

Notice on website

- ?- A notification of an event or a notice about upcoming Council meetings or a notice that acts as a window to get more details about major issues is often placed prominently on the home page to keep content fresh and relevant to visitors. These can take the form of banner-style ads, or news-style items with headlines, or a picture/graphic with a cutline. They are all links that lead to additional details when the visitor clicks on it.
- ① Using the home page of a website or frequently visited pages of a site to post information about current events and issues allows visitors to get information when and where they want it.

The web is a major channel of information gathering for most people and they expect to be able to get details about important local topics from the municipality via the municipality's website. Addressing items of major impact in real time helps keep the municipality's website useful and relevant to its audiences. The web is also an easy and cost-effective way to deliver information in multiple languages using technologies such as PDFs.

⇒ The majority of households in BC will have access to a computer and the internet so notices posted on a website will have the potential to reach a high percentage of residents in any jurisdiction.

★ A strike by CUPE in the City of Vancouver in 2007 had a major impact on city services, including garbage and community centers. The city used its website to keep residents informed about what services were affected and also provided tips about how to cope during the strike.

Media release

? A media release is used to notify local media about issues, events, positions/statements, and progress on projects. It is generally issued to keep the media informed about current projects or in response to events that have occurred that require a response.

ⓘ Media releases are useful for keeping the media up to date about projects, municipal issues, and positions. Keeping the media informed is beneficial because you want to build bridges before you need them – it helps to maintain a friendly, open door relationship with local reporters and editors. Coverage resulting from a media release, gains credibility because the story has been vetted by an independent third party and the public tends to put more faith in news stories than in ads.

⇒ Because media releases are sent broadly to all relevant local media, a media release which addresses an issue the media deems pertinent to local citizens has a good chance of reaching a high percentage of the local population.

USEFUL RESOURCES

City of Vancouver
The City used its home page effectively during the 2007 outside workers' strike to keep the population updated about negotiations, notices and waste disposal information.
(www.city.vancouver.bc.ca)

Direct mail

? Direct mail (often referred to as letter drops) is typically unaddressed mail that is delivered via Canada Post to resident mailboxes. Frequently used to distribute advertising and coupons, the piece does not have to be in an envelope.

i Direct mail is a cost-effective way to deliver printed material directly to a household. It can be mass produced and does not have to be personalized, which saves time and money.

⇒ Direct mail can be delivered via postal code, so all households within a postal code area will receive the item. This allows distribution to be fairly targeted, via neighbourhoods, or to be done on a municipal-wide basis.

Staff briefing on messaging regarding local issues

? Whenever issues or major projects arise, it is important that staff be made aware of the municipality's position. This is especially true for department spokespeople and frontline staff who may be called upon to deal with constituents who demand answers. Briefings are typically held first thing in the morning, or immediately after an incident, either in person or via teleconference with a key goal being to apprise stakeholders of appropriate responses and positioning statements.

i Briefings are useful because they keep all staff up to date on what the municipality's position is with regard to key issues and events. They also ensure that residents will hear a consistent message when they speak to staff or council members.

Briefing / issue note

? Briefing/issue notes (also called backgrounders) provide quick reference for staff and council about the municipality's position on major incidents and events, etc. They are typically issued in conjunction with briefing sessions so that all participants have the same reference notes.

i Issue notes ensure that there is a permanent, consistent record of speaking points and positioning from the municipality's perspective that has been approved by senior officials.

★ A series of rare severe winter storms left the Lower Mainland without power for several days in mid-December 2006. The power outages crossed municipal boundaries and required cooperation on a massive scale, as well as continuous updating of over 1,000,000 residents. Issue notes kept staff and spokespeople up to date on the status of repairs and the impact of outages across jurisdictions.

Notification sign

? Notification signs are information signs posted on sites – either buildings or vacant land – that indicates some development activity has been proposed for the site, and describes what the proposal is for that site or building. These signs typically contain references to a municipal bylaw, including zoning, the names of the requestors, a project number and, if applicable, a picture or blueprint drawing.

i These signs are helpful in communicating the proposed plans for a site, helping citizens to visualize the impact and changes a building or vacant lot may go through. They also help to raise awareness about the proposed change.

★ Anyone within the immediate vicinity of the lot or building are likely to see the sign so the affected neighbourhood has good exposure to the proposed change.

On-hold message - customized to topics as required

? The on-hold message callers hear when waiting to speak to a telephone contact is used to convey key messages. Instead of the usual music, callers hear customized scripts recorded by voice professionals that promote events, etc.

i On-hold messages help to reinforce municipal positions on key issues, inform callers about upcoming events like Town Hall meetings or zoning forums, or promote participation in committees or surveys. It is an easy, cost-effective way to take advantage of a “captive” audience.

Newsletter

? Newsletters are information updates issued on a regular publication schedule. They are generally organized around a specific topic or area of interest, often used to keep people informed about projects, social club happenings or community issues. Stories are typically short and take more of an overview perspective than an in-depth approach.

i Because they are typically quick snippets of news and updates, newsletters are effective channels for keeping stakeholders informed at a high level. They follow a template format that promotes easy, fast production and, with the advent of eNewsletters, cheap distribution.

★ Distribution of newsletters requires some form of subscription service, either via email or RSS (Rich Site Syndication) feeds. Sign up can be open to the general population, or can be restricted.

USEFUL RESOURCES

PHSA at Work is a monthly newsletter from the Provincial Health Services Authority that provides an overview of the activities across the PHSA. (www.phsanewletters.ca)

Display

? On-site information booths with strong graphics and compelling signage/headlines are useful tools that allow the public to ask questions of real people who have been briefed on project details. Booths are generally small, with pictures and large, bullet pointed text explanations. Staffed by “experts” who can answer questions about specific topics, the booth will be equipped with handouts that visitors can take away.

i Bringing the information to the people – setting up the booths in shopping centres or at local events helps residents gain access to answers about municipal initiatives. On-site displays are also good ways to raise awareness about projects, events and municipal initiatives. Since the booths are generally set up in high traffic locations, they provide good exposure to a broad audience.

-
- ★ During the development of www.citysoup.ca, a roving team of ambassadors set up information displays around the region at shopping centres and events. The public was able to learn more about the project, ask questions and walk away with promotional items, most typically designed for children.

Pamphlet/post card

- ? Pamphlets and post cards are print publications that are generally focused on a single message. A post card is printed on stiff "cover-weight" paper and is generally printed on both sides. It can contain text, graphics or a combination. Pamphlets, too, are printed on both sides, and are generally printed on glossy, folded paper.

- ❶ Post cards are good for quick reminders or promotional support pieces because they can be mailed without an envelope. They also display well in wall holders. Pamphlets are good as information summaries because they offer more space and, with the folds, natural segmentation for information.

- ⇒ Because distribution is easy and cost-effective for both post cards and pamphlets, they can be used to reach a wide audience.

- ★ Canada held a nation-wide census in 2006 and used post cards to remind households that their participation was required by law. Post cards contained details on how and where to complete the census.

Personally addressed letter

- ? Personally addressed letters are a form of one-on-one communication used to initiate a direct line of contact between the sender and the receiver.

- ❶ Personally addressed letters are effective because they are comparatively rare these days. They would typically be used to indicate the level of importance of the topic addressed in the letter and so would only be used for major municipal initiatives or under special circumstances.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Kingston Electors have a background paper on the impact of a waterfront development proposal in front of city council. (www. kingstonelectors.ca/article.php?id=519)

"Expert" commentary

?

Expert commentary is provided by subject matter experts about topics that might otherwise be too complex for the average resident to understand on their own. Things like the impact of zoning proposals, bylaw changes, or a major change to the Official Community Plan are examples where expert opinion can be used to help residents understand what it means to them personally.

ⓘ The inner workings of local government and the impact of zoning changes are generally things that the average person finds confusing and intimidating. When asked to vote on proposals that will affect the municipality, an informed resident is the best asset the municipality has, so helping them understand all of the implications of what they are voting on will pay long term dividends.

★ The City of Kingston, Ontario has a website created by a group called the Kingston Electors whose goal is "to foster good local government." Their paper on a waterfront development proposal offers an example of "expert" commentary on a city initiative.

Billboard

?

Billboards are large outdoor advertising signs located on the side of buildings or situated along major thoroughfares. Typically used for promotional campaigns, billboards tend to contain one single, simple message, as the major audience is automobile drivers who view the signs for minimal periods as they drive by.

ⓘ Billboards are useful for promoting a single, effective message over a broad geographic area as they are usually purchased as part of a multi-location campaign. Large and graphic, billboards deliver a static and consistent message to a repeat audience as commuters and pedestrians pass by the same location daily.

⇒ Purchased either in a single location or as part of a multi-spot buy, billboards capture the attention of a wide audience on major roads.

Radio ad

? Radio ads generally run in 30 or 60 second formats and consist of audio (spoken word and/or music) clips promoting an event or proposed initiative.

ⓘ Catering to different tastes, radio offers an opportunity to segment messaging effectively. It is a cost-effective form of advertising that reaches a broad audience, and, through repetition within very short time frames – like two or three times an hour – radio commercials can help ensure a message is heard.

★ Participation in local elections has been on the decline for many years and as part of a drive to encourage people to get out and vote, the City of Vancouver ran commercials on local radio stations in the municipal elections of 2008.

TV ad

? Television ads generally run in 15, 30 or 60 second formats with video and audio components. Most commercials are produced by an agency that specializes in TV.

ⓘ Television ads can be costly to produce and air but they are an effective means of reaching a broad audience.

Podcast

? Podcasts are audio or video files that are available through syndication. You can listen to individual podcasts on your desktop computer, download them to a portable listening device (such as iPods or any other MP3 players) or subscribe to make the process automatic when new podcasts are added.

ⓘ Podcasts are useful when a sound or video clip will add extra impact. They are popular among the 18-35 crowd as a means of getting news and information updates. Podcasts are downloadable, can be listened to anywhere, anytime and have a longer shelf life than traditional radio and TV broadcasts. Also, because they are created and recorded by the "source," podcasts allow the entity to retain control of the message.

★ The CBC uses podcasts to communicate news and various radio programs.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Podcasts are digital media files, usually part of a series pertaining to a specific subject matter available for download or listening from a web page. The CBC podcasts are programmed based on their popular radio and TV features. (www.cbc.ca/podcasting)

Blog

- ?
- Blog is short for weblogs, which provide frequently updated commentary or news on a particular subject such as food, politics, or local news. Communities of bloggers now have easy tools to syndicate, update, and search content.
- ?
- Blogs are useful as communication tools that provide a direct link between the author and the audience. Blogging tools are easy to use and require no knowledge of code, so they can be easily set up and managed by technophobes. The author controls the message and they are considered a valued alternative to media stories. Blogs are also a growing means of engaging the community via their ability to provide a forum for views and opinions in the comments sections of a blog. Reviewing the comments shared on a blog post can provide a good straw poll on community opinion.
- ★
- Blogs are flourishing among the political community, especially at the national level. Party leaders and commentators alike use blogs to sway voters and build support for views and platforms.

RSS feed

USEFUL RESOURCES

The City of Tampa offers RSS feeds to keep up to date on the latest posting to the city's site. (www.tampagov.net/appl_rss_feeds/rss.asp?feed=news)

- ?
- Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds allow people to sign up for updates on web pages without having to give their email addresses. This anonymous subscription format has rapidly replaced email as a delivery method and is very popular among the net generation, as no personal information is required. A "feed reader" (which is web-based and requires no downloads of software) notifies the subscriber of any updates to the section of the website that they have subscribed to. The reader shares a short description – either a headline or a couple of lines of text – about the update and a link to the full item.
- ?
- All major news sites offer RSS feed options, as do most media pages on corporate sites. RSS feeds have an anonymous quality, as no personal information is captured. The hosting site does not need to maintain a database of addresses and the cost to distribute newsletters is minimal because there is no maintenance required nor any privacy law compliance.

Tagging / tag cloud

? Tagging allows visitors to put labels on pages that make sense to them. Much like bookmarks, but the labels are very personalized. An example would be a picture of a puppy posted to a photo site. Someone might tag it “puppy, cute, dog.”

While someone else might come along and tag it as “irritating, messy, high maintenance,” the next person who searches on the site for messy would have this picture returned or if they searched on cute, they would also get this picture.

i A tag cloud is a visual depiction of the content tags applied to a website. Often, more frequently used tags are depicted in a larger font or otherwise emphasized using bold or colour.

⇒ Installing easy one-click tagging options by any of the providers (digg, delicious, etc.) and a corresponding tag cloud view of what people are tagging on a site gives a unique insight into the minds of visitors. They organize and label content the way they think. Tag clouds can help provide better navigation labeling or search term optimization for a website.

Wiki

? A wiki is a collaborative web page that can be collectively edited by anyone with access to it (or with privileges). Multiple people can edit the content on the page without having to download software or know any special code. Instead of trying to follow an email trail of changes to Word attachments, editors can go to a single site, change the most current version and see the history of changes.

i Wikis are useful collaborative tools that allow teams to contribute to documents and have the edits displayed in real time. Knowledge is no longer hidden in email trails, but captured and shared in the various versions of the wiki. Because no special code or software is required to edit the page, wikis are accessible by anyone with a web browser. Any member of a community can share their opinions in an easy to use forum.

USEFUL RESOURCES

A tag is a way to link connections and identify pieces of information by key words, primarily for easier searchability.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) CDC.gov tag cloud is an alphabetized list of the most popular search topics on the CDC.gov website. The text size of the term shows its relative popularity: bigger terms are more popular than smaller ones. (www.cdc.gov/ToolsResources)

USEFUL RESOURCES

How to start a Wiki:
Get step by step instructions on how to create your own Wiki page: (www.wikihow.com/Start-a-Wiki)

⇒ Wikis can be left “open” whereby all visitors to the page can edit the contents, or they can be “closed” and only editable by authorized contributors.

★ Companies are using wiki technology to manage lists like glossaries for new employees, where the list is managed by the staff at large. The World Health Organization is using a wiki to update its International Classification of Diseases.

Banner ad on web

? A banner ad is a form of advertising on the web. It can be horizontal or vertical in format, and today many banner ads “float” around a page. They are clickable images that often contain animation and sound, much of which activates when a cursor passes over the ad (without the visitor having to click on it).

① Use of banner ads – on audience-appropriate sites and even within the municipality’s own website – allows for the promotion of key messages and events. Banner ads can be used to solicit feedback, direct viewers to additional information about high profile topics and more.

Email lists

? Email lists are databases of email addresses that subscribers have shared in order to have a newsletter or other form of update delivered to their email inbox. Strict privacy legislation and resistance to spam (unsolicited email) means that email lists must be permission-based – the person has agreed to receive information from you by signing up to the list.

① Email lists are useful communication channels to pre-selected audiences, who by self-selection match the demographic profile the list keeper wishes to reach. Email subscription lists provide convenient means of reaching an audience.

Social networking / online community

- ?
- Social networking involves starting an online community or page that can provide easy interaction and engagement of individuals. Currently websites such as Facebook or Youtube provides an outlet for each user to present their interests, identity and voice.
- ?
- Social networking allows for information sharing, gathering and promotion as well as provides opportunities for community engagement and participation. Using social networking sites allows the host to directly link to interested individuals and can be promoted quickly through the group or individual messaging or sharing of web links. These sites can also provide fast feedback or participation in polls, the capability to upload photos and the ability to comment, or 'Like' (or support) an idea or question. There is also a strong benefit to using a medium that many people have frequent access to via preloaded applications on mobile technologies (e.g., cell phones and tablets).

3.2.2 Consultation methods

Workshop

- ?
- A workshop involves a group of people who meet to work through an issue and/or develop solutions. Workshops may be formally or informally structured to disseminate information about a particular topic and provide a forum for group discussion. To make workshops more interactive, they typically involve larger, as well as smaller group exercises. Workshops may take place over a two (2) hour period or last an entire day and are usually facilitated by one (1) or more trained facilitators.

- ?
- Workshops generate discussion and broader thinking regarding an issue or topic. They also provide a forum through which participants can genuinely be involved in identifying and solving particular issues.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Enhancing Education
Explanations and examples of workshop scheduling, sample workshop agendas, and evaluation questions. (<http://enhancinged.wgbh.org/formats/person/wkshpplanning.html>)

⇒ Workshops may involve a small number of people (e.g., 10-12) or a larger number of people (e.g., 30-40). Workshops that have more than forty (40) participants may be difficult to manage and may create challenges for participants to actively engage in workshop activities and exercises.

★ The City of Evanston, Illinois, (www.cityofevanston.org, search '2010-2014 Consolidated Plan') used two public workshop sessions as part of their ongoing Downtown Planning Project to learn what residents had to say about the revitalization of the area. Residents identified solutions such as pedestrian friendly walkways, better public amenities, and tighter rules on development plans.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Byron Shire Council presents several municipal decision policies and plans on public display online. (www.byron.nsw.gov.au/public-exhibition)

Public exhibition and the invitation of written submissions

? A public exhibition is the formal exhibit of a plan, document, or project at key locations for a set period of time. These exhibitions allow the public to view and provide input on the displayed information. Public exhibits should operate over a number of hours and be located in publicly accessible venues such as libraries, community centres, or shopping malls. Public exhibits may invite the public to submit their views on the proposed concept or activity via a written submission to the municipality – called inviting submissions. Depending on the scope of the proposed project or issue, notice of public exhibitions and inviting submissions may be given to the community at large and/or target specific groups within the community.

① Public exhibitions and inviting submissions allow the broader community to provide feedback on a proposed draft plan, project, or issue. This type of public engagement method may be open to the broader community and/or target specific groups within the community.

★ In 2008, the City of Red Deer drafted a plan available for public review at a public exhibition. For more information, visit the City of Red Deer website: www.city.reddeer.ab.ca and search 'Municipal Development Plan.'

Survey

? A survey is a structured form or questionnaire distributed to a relevant population group within the community. Surveys may be carried out in a number of ways depending on the purpose, scope, and stakeholders involved. The five main types of surveys include: web-based surveys, telephone surveys, mail out surveys, in-person interviews, and hand out surveys linked to a service or facility. In order to easily collate and analyze results, survey questions are typically clear, simple, and closed (e.g., tick box, choice of given answers, or Likert scale of preference 1-5) with space provided for comments.

i Surveys are used to gather data, assess needs, gain feedback, and/or collect community opinions.

⇒ Surveys can be designed for any number of people, from the entire community to specific groups within the community. When conducting a survey, it is important to ensure the number of responses adequately represents the group you are surveying.

★ The Township of Verona, New Jersey, implemented a municipal web-based survey allowing Verona residents to share their perceptions and suggestions about their local government, specific public issues, and various municipal services. For more information, visit the following website: www.quantisoft.com/Surveys/VeronaResults.htm.

USEFUL RESOURCES

What is a Survey?
Directions and resources for developing and implementing surveys.
(www.whatisasurvey.info)

USEFUL RESOURCES

SPARC BC's Resident Satisfaction Survey Guide gives tips in survey design and data collection.
(www.sparc.bc.ca, search 'Resources and Publications')

Suggestion box

? A suggestion box allows members of the public to provide ideas and feedback. Participants either write down their suggestions and/or input on a piece of paper and insert it into a box administered by municipal staff, or type their comments into a designated municipal webpage for suggestions. Suggestion boxes can be used to gather information about a specific issue or to collect general comments. To encourage community members to use suggestion boxes, they are often brightly coloured, have paper available with specific questions or space for comments, and are located on a front counter or entrance of a municipal office. Suggestions are generally anonymous unless contact details are recorded to follow up on the suggestion provided.

USEFUL RESOURCES

On Wikipedia, Suggestion_box provides a definition and instructions on how to prepare a suggestion box.
(www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki)

① Suggestion boxes are a useful way of enabling programs and services to be improved in response to community ideas and input.

⇒ Suggestion boxes can be open to anyone in the community or they can be targeted to a specific population. The location of the suggestion box, as well as how it is advertised, will determine who participates.

★ The Sechelt and District Chamber of Commerce has an online suggestion box to determine how they can serve the community better. For more information, visit the following website: www.secheltchamber.bc.ca/suggestions.html.

USEFUL RESOURCES

The Center for Communication Programs suggest that setting up a hotline field guide offers in depth description of methods to follow in setting up a hotline or phone in service. (<http://jhuccp.org>, search 'hotline')

Hotline or phone-in

? Hotlines or phone-ins involve municipal staff setting up and advertising a phone line that members of the community can call to provide input on a particular community issue. Hotlines or phone ins are open to the public for a set period of hours, days, or weeks. Municipal staff or trained staff answer the calls and record and/or respond to comments. To encourage community members to use hotlines, it is important to advertise the topic under discussion, provide background information, and indicate why community members should be involved.

① A hotline or phone-in is used to provide a time limited opportunity for community members to give their feedback on a particular issue or project. This method of public engagement also allows people to discuss their particular needs, opinions, or concerns.

⇒ Hotline or phone-ins can be open for anyone to participate.

★ The City of Davis, California, has a Pesticide Hotline available to community members to gain information about the use and potential hazards of pesticides in the Davis community. For more information, visit the following website: <http://cityofdavis.org/pw/ipm/hotline.cfm>.

Public meeting

? A public meeting is a facilitated, formal meeting with members of the general public where the municipality can share information, make presentations, and discuss a particular issue or project with citizens.

A public meeting is useful for face-to-face interaction between the municipality and the citizens. Formal public meetings can generate interest in the community about a topic and serve as a venue for citizens to raise questions or concerns they may have.

ⓘ A public meeting can be guided by facilitators, and can include additional speakers presenting on a topic. There should be adequate time for the public to give their feedback and ask questions.

⇒ The number of participants can be large or small; however, venue selection should be planned accordingly.

☆ The City of Vancouver held public meetings as part of their "Living in Community" project to discuss with local residents concerns and strategies on issues surrounding the sex trade. For more information visit: www.livingincommunity.ca.

Online forum

? An online forum is part of a website where expression of viewpoints and discussion can take place in the form of electronic postings. Online forums are open to postings for a set period of time: hours, days, weeks, months or indefinitely. An administrator has the ability to add, edit or remove content monitors an online forum. The administrator can create the topic of the online forum or can allow individual users to create it.

ⓘ An online forum is useful for generating interest and feedback from the public over a period of time and does not require the same amount of physical investment as a public forum. An online forum is accessible at any time of the day and therefore may appeal to regular Internet users because it does not require planning to participate.

USEFUL RESOURCES

The Florida Department of Transportation has a handbook and toolkit on how to plan public involvement including a chapter of public meetings. (www.dot.state.fl.us/planning/training/PItraining.shtml)

USEFUL RESOURCES

Think of It provides over 14 links and resources for how to create online communities. (www.thinkofit.com)

- ⇒ The forum can be open to anyone and can be anonymous, or only to members who sign up with a special username.
- ★ The City of Mississauga has created an online discussion forum called eTown Hall where residents can post responses under topics such as "Active Living – Fitness, Sports, Recreation" or "Getting Around – Transit, Roads, Traffic." For more details, visit: www.mississauga.ca and search 'E Town Hall'.

Meeting with stakeholders

- ❓ Meetings with stakeholder groups entail identifying which groups in the population are the most affected and concerned about a decision, project, or issue. The stakeholders are invited to attend a session where a facilitator can guide the group through a discussion, giving them information about a topic and recording their feedback.
- ⓘ Meetings with stakeholder groups are useful to obtain feedback, to learn about needs or ideas from the stakeholder groups, and to involve stakeholders in the planning process.
- ⇒ The number of people involved may depend on the number of stakeholder groups. Smaller groups can be less formal and larger groups demand more structure.
- ★ Developing the Vancouver Agreement involved meetings with numerous organizations operating in the Downtown Eastside to learn about the economic and social indicators of the area, the experiences of those organizations working in the area, and to identify what gaps or issues could be addressed by an economic revitalization plan. For more information, visit: www.vancouveragreement.ca.

Focus group

- ?
- Focus groups are structured interviews with a small number of people from a key stakeholder group. The group is led through a series of questions by a facilitator and the feedback is usually recorded by an audio recorder and sometimes by another individual.
- ?
- Focus groups are useful when planning a project or campaign that targets a specific portion of the population. Obtaining feedback from a small, specific group of that population can shed light on what will be effective and appropriate for that population in general.
- ⇒ The ideal number of participants in a focus group is 8-10.

Site tour

- ?
- An organized tour of a site involves discussion and question and answer sessions about site plans and can obtain feedback from community members. The tour can be organized for a small or large group.
- ?
- Site tours inform community members or specific stakeholder groups of the issues, concerns, or details of a proposed site or development. Site tours offer a chance for the public and stakeholders to imagine development or see development in progress and to have their concerns heard or questions answered.
- ★ The City of Toronto engaged citizens in their development plans for an environmental community centre, 'Evergreen Commons', by holding stakeholder workshops and a site tour. 'Evergreen Commons' was built on the site of the historical Don Valley Brick Works. For more information visit: <http://ebw.evergreen.ca>.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Texas Center for the Advancement of Literacy and Learning. Tips and the basics on the uses of focus groups. (www-tcall.tamu.edu/orp/orp1.htm)

USEFUL RESOURCES

Victorian Local Governance Association Online Guide offers a detailed description of many methods for consultation and engagement including focus groups. (www.vlga.org.au/Resources/Consultation_and_Engagement.aspx)

USEFUL RESOURCES

National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation
Online dialogue community and network, access to over 2000 resources in their learning exchange.
(<http://ncdd.org/>)

USEFUL RESOURCES

An article by Wendy Sarkissina and Andrea Cook Speaking Out in Community Engagement: A review of 'Fifteen years of Refinement' can be found under Conference papers and abstracts can be found at: www.engagingcommunities2005.org.

USEFUL RESOURCES

David Bohm presents theoretical principles of dialogue, and explanation about how to start a dialogue, including numbers, duration, etc. (www.david-bohm.net/dialogue)

Dialogue

?

Dialogue is a form of facilitated engagement on a topic that allows participants to have a free flowing conversation about that topic. The goal of dialogue is to improve understanding of an issue and create a shared understanding of an issue. While a facilitator is present to give structure to the format of the dialogue, the participants typically direct the content of the discussion.

❶

Dialogue encourages people to tell stories. Every participant is encouraged to say something and contribute to broader thinking on an issue. The best physical arrangement for a dialogue is a circle where participants can feel on an equal footing and have eye contact with others.

SpeakOut

?

The SpeakOut model was developed by Dr. Wendy Sarkissian and Andrea Cook, which they define as a lively, innovative, colorful and interactive staffed exhibition — a hybrid event combining some of the characteristics of a meeting with an exhibition or 'open house'.

❶

The purpose is to provide an informal and interactive public meeting where a wide range of people have a chance to participate. It is designed to facilitate structured 'drop-in' participation about planning and design issues. Typically, a SpeakOut is structured into a number of 'issue stalls', which relate to findings of earlier consultations and to the specific project goals. Participants come to the venue and address the issues on which they wish to 'speak out' and have their say.

⇒

A SpeakOut is used in any community planning process and can be organized at the start of a process — to introduce a community to a project and generate early enthusiasm and participation — or at the end of a process to 'test' material generated in other consultation processes and 'wrap up' a substantial consultation phase.

Quick 1 question online poll

? Online polls are a fast and easy way to take the pulse of the public about topics of interest. They use online “voting” technology that allows anonymous visitors to click on a choice from a list of options and track the responses. Results are shared once the person has clicked on a choice, or they can be shown without having to vote.

① Online polls can be a fun, quick peek into the opinions of residents about any number of topics. They can be used to gauge support for a municipal initiative or they can be used for lighter things – like chocolate or vanilla ice cream preferences. Online polls help to raise awareness of issues, and they help a website stay fresh. Polls are a good means of engaging the community and getting feedback.

Open Space

? Open Space meetings take form according to participants’ agendas. Participants sit in a large circle and devote their first hour towards creating their own meeting. All participants are teachers and learners. When a topic is brought up, everyone provides their views and opinions on the topic. There is no limit to the number of participants. The conference usually lasts as long as necessary and concludes when participants decide that their work is done. The idea is to allow participants to create and define their version of a meeting and articulate what they believe are the important and essential issues.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Co-Intelligence Institute.
“Open Space Technology”
(www.co-intelligence.org/P.Openspace.html)

Open Space World:
(www.openspaceworld.org)

PlaceSpeak: Geo-verified Online Consultation

? PlaceSpeak’s mandate is to promote meaningful dialogue on local issues and engage with local decision-makers. PlaceSpeak recognizes Internet technology offers new accessible opportunities for communication and for gathering verifiable evidence to support decisions. PlaceSpeak is a location-based online community consultation platform that connects residents and citizen users with governments, businesses and organizations in their own neighbourhoods.

USEFUL RESOURCES

PlaceSpeak:
www.placespeak.com

Online Geo-verification is useful to promote non-anonymity particularly in consultations where the proponent may want to limit participants to within specific geographic boundaries. PlaceSpeak provides an easy-to-use platform with multiple features including: discussion forums, polls and surveys and notice boards.

ⓘ PlaceSpeak geo-verification allows proponents to know that they consulted with the right people from the right place and residents to connect to topics in areas that affect them the most, and prevents fraudulent responses from the same user. It is a cost effective way to reach a broad spectrum of the public and produce verifiable evidence to support decision-making and public policy development.

⇒ Anyone can sign up for PlaceSpeak and connect to topics. It can be integrated with Facebook and Twitter accounts.

★ PlaceSpeak has been the geo-verification platform for a growing number of projects, including the City of New Westminster's Master Transportation Plan and the City of Vancouver's Mayor's Taskforce on Affordable Housing.

Charrette

USEFUL RESOURCES

The National Charrette Institute (NCI) is a non-profit educational institution that specializes in Charrette design. There are several useful tools available on their website: www.charretteinstitute.org.

The Charrette Center encourages the sharing of information regarding Charrettes. See the following link for more details: www.charrettecenter.net.

? A charrette is an intensive, multi-disciplinary developmental process that is designed to facilitate an open discussion between community stakeholders. A team of experts meets with community groups, developers and neighbors over a period from 3-4 days to 2 weeks gathering information on the issues that face the community. The charrette team then works together to develop solutions that will result in a clear, detailed, realistic plan for future development.

ⓘ Charrettes are popular because they are often fun and attract the interest of a broad range of people. They serve as a useful way of marketing the project in question and provide a good story for the press.

⇒ Charrettes vary in size, from 50 to over 1,000 people.

★ Bealls Hill Neighborhood, Florida, assembled its various visions during a community design charrette from October to November 2001. The process is documented online at: www.beallshill.com.

Community Mapping

? Community Mapping is a participatory process that enables citizens to map the social, ecological and economic assets, along with historical events of their community. It is a useful way for initiating dialogue and planning in a community. Mapping is an accessible and graphic way to learn about people's perceptions of a place and can be useful in the visioning process.

① The method can be used to document certain aspects, strengths or weaknesses, or locations of services within a community, neighbourhood or municipality. It is useful to break a large group into smaller circles of 3-6 people.

With the use of a blown up map of the municipality, or large blank pieces of paper, participants can use different coloured markers to locate various things on the map. The small group maps can eventually be integrated into a larger, collaborative map.

⇒ This method is interactive and fun, and can also be used successfully with children and youth.

★ The University of Victoria Coastal Community Green Map is a collaborative map that documents the ecological assets of the area, see: www.mapping.uvic.ca/coastal/geobrowser.

Future Search conference

? Future Search conferences are held over 2-3 days to help diverse groups (organizations and/or community members) discover shared values, purposes, and projects. The goal is to help define which actions need to be taken in order to achieve a common mission.

★ For a useful plan on how to conduct a Future Search Conference, visit the Department of Sustainability and Environment of Victoria (Australia) website: www.dse.vic.gov.au.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Community Mapping Network:
www.cmnbc.ca/

USEFUL RESOURCES

For complete details related to a Future Search Conference, see: Future Search Network.
(www.futuresearch.net)

Study circle

? Study circles are an informal gathering of a group who want to discuss a certain topic. The group can range in size, but is often composed of a diverse group of 8-12 people. The group decides how frequently they meet, but usually discussions are held in two hour sessions. A facilitator does not assume the role of a teacher; rather, she leads the conversation by identifying key points, asking questions, and managing the group's process.

★ Aurora Community Study Circles provides an example of the success study circles can bring when used at a community level: http://helpline.deliberative-democracy.net/case_studies/studies.php/aurora.

3.2.3. Methods for public participation in decision-making

Citizens Advisory Committee

? Citizen Advisory Committees in local government are normally comprised of 6-8 appointed citizens that offer community and expert advice on policies, plans, issues and initiatives. The committees, which meet on a regular basis, may be chaired by a city councilor or staff member. Committees can be created for a specific period of time for a particular purpose or established to provide long-term guidance on certain topics under a municipality's jurisdiction.

i Through advisory committees, citizens can express their opinions and concerns on a range of community planning topics, including transportation, community economic development, social issues, environmental stewardship, budgeting, and public service provision, among others. This may create greater support and legitimacy for policies and projects. Furthermore, municipalities and members on the committee can learn vital information that they may not have previously considered due to discussing topics in detail and hearing a range of perspectives. CAC can also contribute to the collaborative solving of issues.

⇒ When establishing Citizen Advisory Committees, planners should consider the type of community representation and expertise desired. Balanced and full representation of citizen interests is ideal, although this may be difficult given the size of the committees and the diversity that exists in communities. In addition, the level of decision-making authority and power plus the specific role of the committee (e.g. consultative, collaborative) should be determined.

★ The City of Victoria used a Citizen Advisory Committee to help with the revision of its Official Community Plan. The committee provided input on its organization and content as well as the broader public engagement strategy used to understand the community's views on how the plan should be updated. Please visit www.shapeyourfuturevictoria.ca/process for more info.

★ All seven Advisory Committees of the District of Saanich reviewed the city's proposed Climate Change Adaptation Plan. They helped to authenticate and prioritize anticipated climate change impacts as well as adaptation response strategies. To learn more about this example, refer to www.saanich.ca/living/climate/plan/ccap.html.

Citizens Jury

❓ The Citizens Jury method is a means for obtaining informed citizen input into policy decisions. The jury is composed of 12-16 randomly selected citizens, who are informed by experts referred to as witnesses. The jurors then go through a process of deliberation where subgroups are often formed to focus on different aspects of the issue. After a series of focused discussions, the jurors produce a decision or provide recommendations in the form of a citizens' report. Usually a 4-5 day process, the Citizens Jury is intended to provide a means for more democratic decision-making.

ⓘ The commissioning authority is required to publicize the jury and its findings, to respond within a set time, and either to follow its recommendations or to explain publicly why not. Compared with other models, Citizens Juries offer a unique combination of information, time, scrutiny, deliberation, and independence.

USEFUL RESOURCES

The Jefferson Center is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that advocates the use of the Citizens Jury method. They have produced the following publication on Citizens Juries: Veasey, K. (2002). Citizens Jury Handbook, The Jefferson Center. This resource can be accessed at: www.jefferson-center.org.

★ The Citizens Jury Project at Australian National University (ANU) is a good example of how to run a Citizens Jury project. Under the project, two Citizens Juries have been run. The first, which was conducted in October 1999, involved examination of the management of national parks and reserves in one Australian state. The second, conducted in January 2000, looked at management options for a coastal road in northern Queensland. For complete details of the project, see: <http://cjp.anu.edu.au>.

USEFUL RESOURCES

The IPAC Centre for Governance Dialogue is a project of the Institute of Public Administration of Canada which offers useful resources on deliberative polls and other methods. (www.ipac.ca). For a detailed discussion of this method, search 'Deliberative polling'.

Deliberative Polls®

? According to Professor James S. Fishkin: "A Deliberative Poll® is designed to show what the public would think about the issues, if it thought more earnestly and had more information about them."

① The IPAC Centre for Governance Dialogue explains a Deliberative Poll® as entailing a large random interview sample, and eventual participation in a weekend face-to-face discussion group, buttressed by a background reading package of materials certified as impartial and balanced by a third party. The discussion phase includes both deliberation and interviews of experts and public officials.

⇒ Surveys conducted both before and after the deliberation process allow for documentation and measurement of the nature and degree of opinion change. Research shows that such experiences can cause significant change in participants' views. A deliberative poll is especially useful when the public is likely to have little information on the issue or when a policy choice depends on trade-offs between competing goods.

★ A popular example of this type of public participation is the Australian Deliberative Poll on Aboriginal Reconciliation, 2001. See the following link for more information: cdd.stanford.edu/polls/docs/summary/archive.

Participatory Budgeting

? Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a mechanism of local government, which brings local communities closer to the decision-making process around public budgets.

ⓘ It is a flexible process, which has been implemented in varying forms across municipalities of all sizes. It works to enhance participation in local democracy, while improving community cohesion and ensuring the delivery of cost-effective local services.

According to the Participatory Budgeting Project website in the UK, when implemented successfully, there are several potential benefits to PB, including:

- Enhancement of participation in local decision-making;
- Reducing the so-called 'democratic deficit';
- A better focus on issues of social exclusion and neighbourhood renewal;
- Bringing clear benefits to the poorest neighbourhoods; and,
- Cost-efficient improvements in service delivery.

★ A good example of PB in Canada can be found in the City of Greater Sudbury. Participatory Budgeting processes began in Sudbury with the 2002 election of a new mayor, who began his term by initiating a Task Force on Community Involvement and Volunteerism. The task force sponsored a series of community meetings for citizens to voice concerns. Emerging from citizen suggestions at these meetings was the concept of "Community Action Networks", which now provide an ongoing structure through which citizens come together in forums to raise issues and voice concerns.

USEFUL RESOURCES

The Participatory Budgeting Project advocates for the use of PB in the UK and around the world. See their site for a wide range of useful resources. (www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk)

International Budget Partnership has a Guide to Participatory Budgeting includes a useful step by step method for using PB methods. ([www.internationalbudget.org](http://internationalbudget.org))

Step 4: Develop a community engagement plan

There are two parts in step four. First, read the key success factors for community engagement: Second, describe your community engagement plan. This part of your work is best achieved through the use of worksheets that we have created for you to use in this section.

4.1. Key considerations of effective community engagement initiatives

Before you begin to write your community engagement plan, it is useful to first consider the general determinants of effective community engagement.

Although there are many different local processes and qualities that determine the success of a public engagement initiative, there are five (5) considerations that should be part of your planning process. In this section we provide short descriptions of each of the following categories of determinants:

1. Clear, accurate and consistent communication with community;
2. Transparent process that links results of community engagement to decision-making;
3. Recognition of knowledge and expertise of participants;
4. Representative participation by relevant population groups;
5. Accessible and socially inclusive.

4.1.1. Clear, accurate and consistent communication with community

The first step to effective community engagement is informing the public about the particular issue or project under discussion. The public must have sufficient information to make informed decisions. Examples of the type of information that the public should receive include pertinent project/issue facts and perspectives, the roles and responsibilities of those in undertaking the project, and constraining factors such as budgets or timelines.

Equally as important as informing is the act of promoting how the public can be involved. The public must be informed of the available avenues to contribute to the process, and therefore consideration should be given to the best method of promotion. Generally, more than one type of promotion is required to increase the likelihood of raising awareness and interest within the community. Further, the level of promotion should reflect the level of impact of a project or issue. For example, a targeted meeting will not require broad promotion. Larger open meetings, workshops, displays, and exhibitions, on the other hand, will require a commitment of resources to broad promotion.

Central to informing the public of an issue or project and the related engagement process is the use of clear accessible language. Technical terms and jargon should be avoided. Informational and promotional material should endeavor to engage the public by making the topic of consultation relevant to their lives. Key questions to guide the development of informing and promoting materials address the basic who, what, when, where, and why. Examples of these questions include:

- **who** is the issue or matter affecting?
- **who** should be involved?
- **what** is the decision, issue?
- **what** does the public need to do?
- **what** potential impacts will this issue/project have on the public?
- **where** will meetings be held?
- **where** will information be available?
- **when** is an activity taking place?
- **when** is a meeting being held?
- **why** is the municipality changing a policy?
- **why** is the municipality providing advice?
- **how** can the public get involved?

In making a decision about the specific project or issue, it is essential to always explain the process that was followed to come to that decision as well as to answer why and how it was decided.

By providing clear expectations of the nature of the project or issue under discussion, including constraints and decision-making steps, unrealistic expectations may be avoided.

4.1.2. Transparent process that links results of community engagement to decision-making

In the context of community engagement, the term ‘transparency’ implies openness, communication, and accountability. Applied, it is a means of holding public officials accountable by making laws, rules, and decisions open to discussion. Transparent public engagement processes enhance trust in public officials and gives confidence that community voices have been heard. Additionally, transparent process projects are able to stand up to scrutiny from the community throughout the project.

Community engagement processes should be designed to be as transparent as possible. It is important to clearly define the objectives of the process, ensure these objectives are realistic, and articulate exactly how the public’s input will be incorporated into the local policy or decision under discussion.

It is essential to provide feedback to participants of a consultation process. Participants have given you their time and knowledge and it is imperative to recognize this by keeping them updated. Information to provide includes how participants’ input has been used, the next steps of the project, and details as to future opportunities for input. Providing feedback on a consultation event is particularly important when there is a significant difference of opinion within the community.

In order to provide feedback to people who have been involved in the consultation event, it is essential to keep accurate records and/or minutes. These records/minutes should be made available to participants and should be utilized throughout the life of the project. In many cases, feedback will need to be provided throughout various stages of a particular project.

4.1.3. Recognition of knowledge and expertise of participants

In designing and implementing public engagement processes, it is imperative to recognize the knowledge and expertise of community participants. They live in the community and experience it day to day. Appropriate community engagement processes should provide opportunities for the thoughts, opinions, ideas, and vision of participating community members to be expressed, acknowledged, and incorporated into the project or policy under discussion.

4.1.4. Representative participation by relevant population groups

The term ‘representation’ refers to the involvement of people who represent the characteristics of a target population group. For example, if an issue or project affects the entire community, then the selected engagement methods should reflect the socio-demographic profile of the community. An issue that relates to the whole community and is considered to be a priority should include statistically valid and highly representative consultation. A consultation program that relates to a small group of users of a facility or service may not need to be statistically valid, but should endeavour to involve as many people as possible from the affected group.

Representative consultation will sometimes require undertaking both qualitative and quantitative types of consultation, particularly when an issue is higher priority or relates to the whole community.

Qualitative consultation refers to the quality of the involvement of people through personal meetings and workshops, where the input will not be statistically valid but will provide a better understanding of the views and expectations of the community.

Quantitative consultation refers to obtaining data to measure the response of the community regarding an issue, need, or view. This is generally undertaken through community and user surveys (by mail, telephone, or interview).

4.1.5. Accessible and socially inclusive

Accessibility is a key consideration for any effort to engage the public. The guiding principle driving accessibility is that all people in the community should have the opportunity to influence municipal policy and decision-making. There are six (6) important factors to address in order to ensure public consultation is accessible. These include:

Venues

The location where public engagement activities take place must be physically accessible to all members of the public. Necessary amenities should be provided for people with a disability such as pathways and ramps at exits, entrances, meeting rooms, wheelchair accessible washrooms, and parking for people with disabilities.

To ensure visual needs are met, an emphasis should be placed on making material and presentations as visually appealing and accessible as possible. Good lighting should be provided in and around the venue. Written materials such as leaflets, forms, overheads, and Power Point presentations should be prepared with readable print.

It is also important to hold meetings in venues that have good acoustics so that visually and hearing impaired people can clearly hear what is being said. Consideration should also be given to the specific needs of people who are hearing impaired, such as providing hearing loops or sign language interpreter.

Language

Language barriers should be considered at all stages of the public engagement process, especially when preparing written material and holding events open to the public. Interpretation of written material in different languages should be provided to people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. This is particularly important when informing the public of a specific issue and promoting a method of consultation. Additionally, ask local cultural groups to distribute translated communication documents to their members. Further, ensure that signs and printed materials used for displays are available in relevant languages.

Language barriers should also be addressed when consulting with groups in person. In particular, consideration should be given to involving interpreters in meetings in order to ensure stakeholders from diverse backgrounds can participate in the consultation. Consideration should also be given to cultural values when planning in-person consultations.

Child care

Parents with young children should have the opportunity to participate in public engagement events. This can be achieved by providing free child care for meeting participants. Additionally, children could be invited to meetings or meetings could be organized to take place during a child play group to ensure parent participation.

Transportation

The need for transportation to and from community engagement events should be taken into consideration. Free transportation should be advertised and provided to members of the public who otherwise might not attend consultation events. People who would likely benefit from this service include seniors, youth, and low-income families who may not have access to a vehicle.

Timing

When consultation events are held is another important factor to consider in planning such events. Events should be scheduled to encourage the public or group(s) being consulted to participate. For example, instead of having one public open house, hold several meetings at different times (e.g., morning, noon, evening, and weekend).

Sense of belonging

For many people, coming to a public engagement activity is often accompanied by feelings of not being welcome. In order to make clear that public engagement meetings are socially inclusive events, ensure that everyone is welcomed for showing up and that their contribution is valued.

Making people feel welcome means holding events in spaces where they feel welcome. As such, consider rotating meetings to different locations to ensure diverse participation. The physical layout of the room or venue also contributes to the inclusiveness of discussion (e.g., dialogue circle instead of standard rows of chairs). The presence of different food types at the public engagement meetings can also go along way to making different groups welcome.

By creating a welcoming environment, the likelihood of a person feeling like they belong at a public engagement event is strengthened. People who feel like they belong usually also feel like they can contribute, which means that they are empowered to shape a part of their lived public experience and enhance the quality and effectiveness of civil society in general.

4.2. Engagement plan worksheets

In this section, you will find two (2) worksheets to help you articulate your community engagement plan. It is important to note that the sheets in this section are designed to accommodate a large multi-dimensional community engagement process. Given the wide variety of approaches to community engagement work, these sheets will likely need to be modified to fit the specific requirements of your engagement process.

To help you plan a community engagement process, we have created two worksheets:

1. Worksheet 1: Pre-planning questions for community engagement
2. Worksheet 2: Implementation framework

Worksheet 1: Pre-planning questions for community engagement

Key Questions	Responses
Why is this initiative needed?	
What community partners should be involved and how should they be involved?	
Do we have the internal capacity to undertake this work or do we need to engage an outside consultant to assist?	
What level of impact are we dealing with?	

Worksheet 2: Implementation framework

Use this worksheet to describe the activities that will need to be achieved, who will be responsible, the resources needed, date of completion, communication tools and methods of using community feedback.

Implementation Plan				
What engagement activities need to happen?	Who is responsible for this activity?	What resources are needed? (new or existing)	When does this need to be done?	What are our success measures and how will we know if we have been successful?
				How will we incorporate the feedback received into how we work with the community?

Step 5: Implement and evaluate the community engagement plan

Once you have a clear community engagement implementation plan, the final step in your process is to do the work that you have planned. Based on the responses that you have received from your key pre-planning questions, you can prioritize the next steps of the plan. It is important to consider which groups you may be able to partner up with to build a stronger network, reach more members of the community, as well as organize your current resources, people and time effectively.

Since community engagement work includes many variables, it is important that you closely monitor and evaluate your approach. Undertaking evaluations of a community engagement process is key to understanding what was done well and what could be improved upon in the future. In your community engagement plan, you can outline some key measures of success and assess the degree to which you have achieved your intended results.

The resources provided can help you evaluate and monitor your community engagement plan:

- 1) Digital Resources for Evaluation is an online database providing resources for the evaluation community in Canada and abroad: www.evaluationcanada.ca/site.cgi.
- 2) Stanford University professor David M. Fetterman provides excellent resources for people interested in Collaborative, Participatory and Empowerment Evaluations: <http://www.davidfetterman.com/empowermentevaluation.htm>.



The Community Engagement Toolkit offers an adaptable approach to designing a community engagement process tailored to specific issues and/or developments in your community.

This toolkit was designed for municipal social planners and other municipal planning staff to design and implement community engagement processes that are inclusive, accessible and results-oriented.



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