Meaningful Engagement + Why It’s Critical to Public Processes

April 5, 2023
Overview

1. Why engage?
2. What does meaningful engagement look like?
3. How do you engage when you don’t have any relationships?
4. How do you engage when resources are scarce?
Why Engage?

The benefits of engagement and how to involve the community in decisions that affect their destiny
Seeing the community as local experts.

- Values our lived experiences
- Informs how we see ourselves
- Responds to real needs/opportunities
- People support what they help create

1. Why engage
Designing for Connection

- Learning to listen
- Develop and strengthen long-term relationships
- Shared Capacity Building
- Co-evolution of our institutions and the communities they serve

1. Why engage
Our future in our hands

- Support the community in shaping its destiny.
- Engage and involve future leaders
- Who will inherit the future?
- Will they find their mark?
What Does Meaningful Engagement Look Like?

Maximizing opportunities for meaningful engagement in a system built to limit engagement
Ladder of Citizen Participation

Sherry Arnstein
### Spectrum of Participation

**International Association for Public Participation**

#### 2. Meaningful engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFORM</th>
<th>CONSULT</th>
<th>INVOLVE</th>
<th>COLLABORATE</th>
<th>EMPOWER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL</strong></td>
<td>To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or decisions.</td>
<td>To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.</td>
<td>To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.</td>
<td>To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC</strong></td>
<td>We will keep you informed.</td>
<td>We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.</td>
<td>We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.</td>
<td>We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Common Engagement Strategies

#### INFORM
- To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.

#### CONSULT
- To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.

#### INVOLVE
- To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

#### COLLABORATE
- To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.

#### EMPOWER
- To place final decision making in the hands of the public.

### Examples
- **Inform**
  - Site plan review
  - Planning / zoning boards
  - Traditional public meetings
  - Capital projects

- **Consult**
  - Comprehensive planning
  - Zoning updates
  - Small area / neighborhood plans
  - Transportation plans
  - Waterfront / downtown revitalization

- **Involve**
  - Site plan review
  - Planning / zoning boards
  - Traditional public meetings
  - Capital projects

- **Collaborate**
  - Comprehensive planning
  - Zoning updates
  - Small area / neighborhood plans
  - Transportation plans
  - Waterfront / downtown revitalization

- **Empower**
  - Comprehensive planning
  - Zoning updates
  - Small area / neighborhood plans
  - Transportation plans
  - Waterfront / downtown revitalization

---

© 1809 International Federation 2018. All rights reserved. 20181112_v1

**2. Meaningful engagement**

- Often not part of public engagement. Typically property owners or governments make the final decision.
### Meaningful Engagement

#### Examples
- Site plan review
- Planning / zoning boards
- Traditional public meetings
- Capital projects
- Comprehensive planning
- Zoning updates
- Small area / neighborhood plans
- Transportation plans
- Waterfront / downtown revitalization
- Capital projects

#### Often not part of public engagement. Typically property owners or governments make the final decision.
Listen.

- See the project from the community’s perspective
- Understand the stories and histories that shape community members’ perceptions
- Integrate community feedback directly into recommendations
- Be flexible and open to change
2. Meaningful engagement

Meet people where they are.

- Tailor outreach to the local community - *where do people hang out?*
- Convenient, accessible
- Speak in terms that are relatable and easily understood
2. Meaningful engagement

Community-inspired

- Understand the physical context
- Community / youth led events
- Celebrate culture
2. Meaningful engagement

**Build trust.**

- Community liaisons
- Invest in the local community
- Small successes
- Establish an ongoing dialogue
- Build long-term relationships
Building Relationships

How to engage when you don’t have any relationships in a community
3. Building relationships

Build on others’ relationships.

- Find someone who can make an introduction
- Partner with community-based organizations active in the community (e.g., food banks)
Community liaison approach.

- Hire local leaders / community members
- Partner with local entities receptive to your effort
- Ensure they play a role in crafting recommendations and decision-making
3. Building relationships

Piggy-back on existing efforts.

- Attend local events, festivals, meetings
- Utilize existing communication outlets pertinent to the local community (e.g., social media, websites, newsletters, utility bills)
Dealing with Scarcity

How to engage when resources are limited
Value engagement from the start.

- Include funding for engagement in government and project budgets
- Build in compensation for community members and organizations to play a role
4. Dealing with scarcity

Build a coalition of partners.

- Share resources
- Align with organizations that have similar interests and target populations to expand outreach
- Community liaisons

“I usually get upset when people say they are bringing the community to the table because they usually don’t. This was different. In every element of the project and every meeting, the community was there, and every voice was heard. That immediately made me want to be part of the project. With this project, we’re giving kids the power to have an influence in where they live.”
- Project Ambassador
Let the community lead the way.

- Invite local leaders and advocates to facilitate discussions
- Create opportunities for community members to connect with and support one another
Youth Collaborations.

- Empower youth to be the face of positive change
- Engage youth groups in outreach efforts.
- Collaborate with youth organizations and compensate youth to help with community outreach
4. Dealing with scarcity

Be resourceful.

- Ask local foundations for support.
- Support local businesses.
- Celebrate local talent.
Meet people where they are.

- Leverage events and places where community members are already
Start with the community.

- Help the community take the first step.
- Support community leaders.
- Be prepared for trial and error.
Thank you!

Johan Matthews
Mutual Design
johan@mutualdesign.co

Benita Law-Diao
cheine@aol.com

Liz Podowski King
Bergmann
lpodowskiking@bergmannpc.com

Mary Moore Wallinger
LAndArt Studio
mmwallinger@landartstudiony.com