

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



1. Why engage

Seeing the community as local experts.

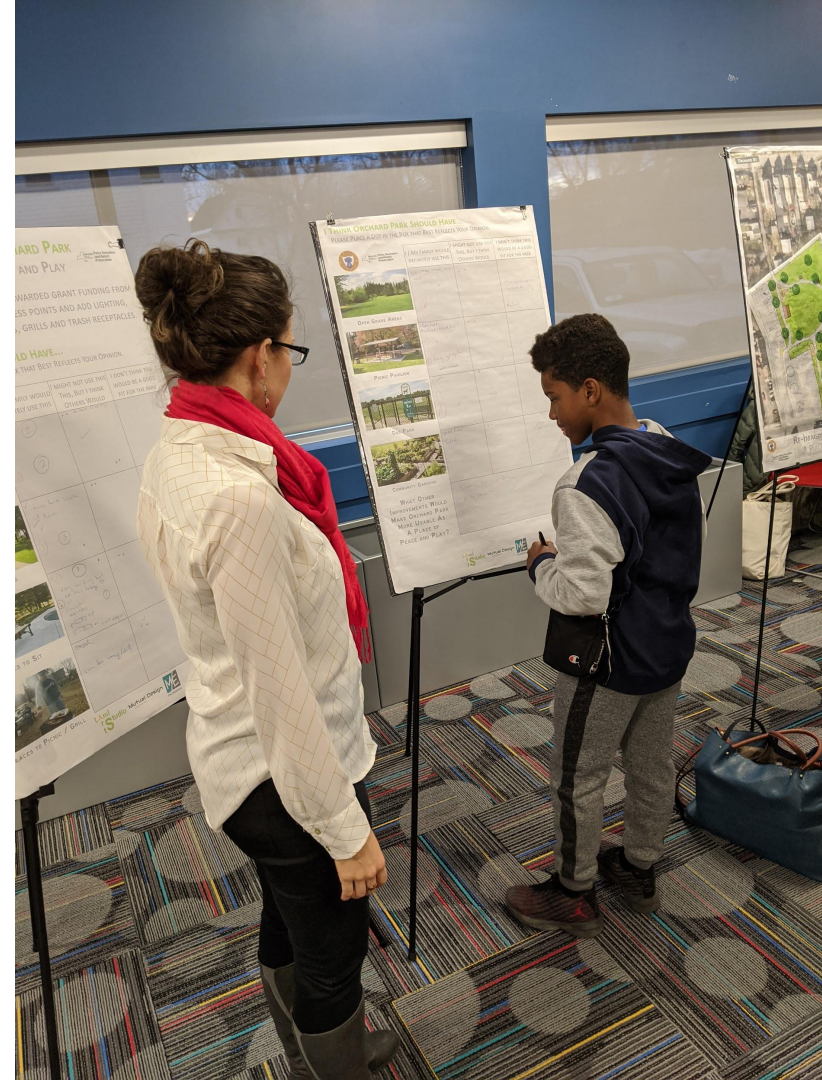
- Values our lived experiences
- Informs how we see ourselves
- Responds to real needs/opportunities
- People support what they help create



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?



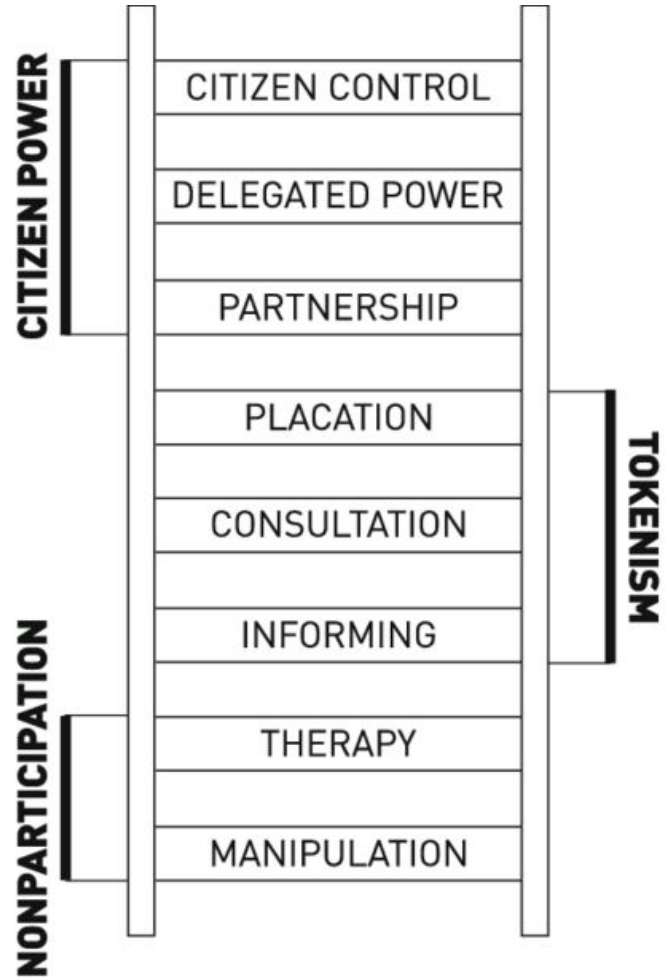
What Does Meaningful Engagement Look Like?

Maximizing opportunities for meaningful engagement in a system built to limit engagement



Ladder of Citizen Participation


Sherry Arnstein



2. Meaningful engagement

Spectrum of Participation

*International Association
for Public Participation*

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION 					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	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.	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.	We will implement what you decide.

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Common Engagement Strategies

EXAMPLES

2. Meaningful engagement

Meaningful Engagement

EXAMPLES

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<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Site plan review• Planning / zoning boards• Traditional public meetings• Capital projects		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Comprehensive planning• Zoning updates• Small area / neighborhood plans• Transportation plans• Waterfront / downtown revitalization• Capital projects		<p>Often not part of public engagement. Typically property owners or governments make the final decision.</p>		

2. Meaningful engagement

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

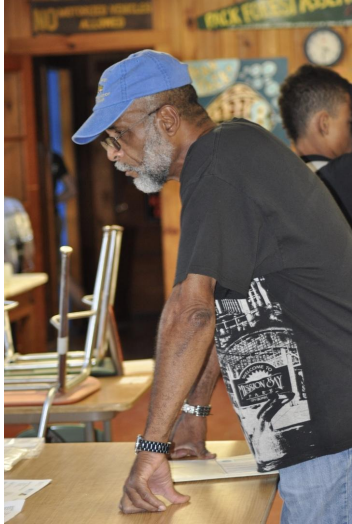


Build on others' relationships.

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



3. Building relationships



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



4. Dealing with scarcity

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



Ambassador

C.O.C.O.A.
House / SOS –
Save Our Street

*"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



Ambassador

Mont Pleasant MS /
Working Group on
Girls of
Schenectady



Ambassador

Community
Fathers



Ambassador

Construction
Manager at the
SEAT (Social
Enterprise and
Training) Center



Ambassador

Local Resident



Ambassador

Mont Pleasant
Neighborhood
Association



Ambassador

Mont Pleasant
Merchants
Association

4. Dealing with scarcity

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.



4. *Dealing with scarcity*

Meet people where they are.

- Leverage events and places where community members are already



4. *Dealing with scarcity*

Start with the community.

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



Thank you!

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