METROPOLITAN AREA PLANNING COUNCIL

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

RECIPE BOOK

MAPC
METROPOLITAN AREA PLANNING COUNCIL

INFORM - ENGAGE - EMPOWER

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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT VOCABULARY

Community Engagement: The process of using different strategies to involve people to participate in decision making and collaboration in a community.

Inform: To provide the community with balanced and objective information regarding opportunities, problems, and/or solutions.

Engage: Two way communication between community leaders and members to gain opinions about existing issues, projects, processes, or ideas.

Empower: To increase the capacity of community members in order to make the best choices that will improve the community as a whole.

(Informed by International Association of Public Participation - IAP2 Spectrum, and worldbank.org) Metropolitan Area Planning Council Community Engagement Division, 2017

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Dear friends,

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) is the regional planning agency serving the people who live and work in the 101 cities and towns of Metropolitan Boston. Our mission is to promote smart growth and regional collaboration.

Done right, community engagement builds trust. It brings fresh thinking, new voices, and creates a more informed and involved public. Therefore, effective community engagement is at the core of our success!

The purpose of this recipe book is to provide you with ideas and strategies to strengthen community engagement in your neighborhood. Our goal is to evolve the recipe book and integrate new strategies as they are developed. We hope that you utilize the strategies that works best for you and encourage you to check out our community engagement chart to help guide your tool selection!

- The Community Engagement Team

FLYERS

Using flyers is one of the most practical ways of communicating with an intended audience.

Whether you are trying to generate support for a project, raise awareness about an event, or inform the public about a community issue, flyers can easily help you get a message across to the community.

Flyers can easily be mailed or posted in public places, making it a cost effective outreach technique.

GROUP TEXTING

Group texting is a very popular form of direct communication, and if used correctly, it can be very effective.

The easiest way to send a group text is through a mass texting service. These services offer ways to categorize and send multiple campaigns that will keep everyone aware and engaged.

Many of these services are able to track and analyze the reach of your intended audience for little to no cost.

INFORM

INFORM

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media platforms make sharing information fast and simple.

Community leaders can easily use social media to inform its members about events or issues in real time. A simple status update, a posted photo or a live video can work to develop trust and transparency in the public eye.

Social media is a powerful tool in spreading messages and gaining public opinion.

PHONE CALLS

Although less widely used now, phone calls is still a relevant form of direct communication.

Phone calls can be automated messages, where the caller can respond in real time or it can be manual calling trees where members call to create a higher sense of importance for the receiver.

Phone calls can be extremely useful in engaging groups that may not be tech savy.

INFORM

INFORM

GROUP TEXTING

More than 97% of text messages are opened and read within minutes of receipt. With this form of communication, make sure you have a clear goal and a desired outcome for your text message campaign.

Choose a provider: Providers ike Textizen, Protexting, Slicktext and Simpletexting are just some options. EZtexting for example allows you up to 250 SMS messages for free. Check these and other providers and choose one that works best for you.

Segment your outreach lists: People have a short attention spans therefore segmenting your audience will allow for more direct messaging. Be specific as to why you are sending them the text in the fist place.

Timing: Timing is key, think about the best times to send your message. Is it during the rush hour traffic time when people are getting out of work or maybe the morning commute?

Messaging schedule: Set a time to send your texts. This will make you more productive!

Maintenance: Take time to update your contact lists. They are only as good as the most up to date contacts.

FLYERS

Define your audience: Be clear who your target audience is. This will determine the layout, design and message for your flyer.

Design: The primary message should be big and bold so that the viewer's eye is immediately drawn to the text. Be sure to consider the maximum viewing distance to ensure legibility of the flyer.

Establish credibility: Use branding to indicate who you are and briefly explain why you want participation. Branding establishes credibility, it will tell the audience that involvement will lead to action.

Fonts: Use two to three fonts at the most. Make sure that the font is legible and clear.

Color choice: Color can be used to strengthen your brand and message. Printing in color is usually more expensive so think ahead when using color if you are on a budget.

Benefit statements: Define reasons why your audience should want to do whatever it is you're trying to get them to do. Make sure it is accurate -- otherwise, you risk undercutting your message with false or misleading information.

PHONE CALLS

Get prepared: Write a script. Introduce who you are, what you do, and the project you're working on. Know what you want to ask the listener by the end of the call. Keep it short and simple.

Ask questions and listen! Ask questions and listen to the receivers' needs and concerns. This will help you determine how to best frame the reasons why they should participate in your project.

Seek out a personal connection: By seeking out a personal connection with the receiver you can build trust and increase the chances of them supporting you.

Get a commitment: After establishing all of the above, ask them if they can participate in your initiative. Let them know why their participation is crucial to the process. Make the ask, and wait for an answer.

Follow up: After your initial contact following up ideally within the hour with a summary of your conversation, any resources or next steps to engagement.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Decide on an outlet: Think about your audience and who you want to engage? What social media platform do they typically use and how do they use it? Cater your message to not only the audience, but also base it on the platform that you are using.

Develop content: Based on your audience build relevant content. You can include elements such as articles, images, videos or news. Think about what will resonate best with them.

Maintain and update: Only use the social media outlets that you can manage and use. If you have capacity to only post one time a week, do that. This will build trust with your audience over time so they know what they can expect from you.

Build on what is working: Are you working or collaborating with partners? Figure out what has worked for them and build your following based on similar social media work. Share related content and highlights with others that are doing similar work. It is likely they will do the same for you!

Conversation matters: Interact with your followers. Think about what questions you can pose to the public to increase participation. Once you ask the question, make sure to comment on responses and engage in a dialogue typically no later than 24 hours from when the comment was made.
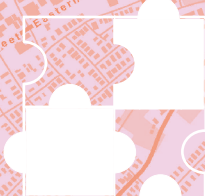
FOCUS GROUPS

A focus group is a small group of six to ten people that participate in an open discussion, usually led by a moderator.

The size of the focus group is important because it needs to be large enough to generate rich discussion, but not too large that participation is limited.

Focus groups are a great way to receive qualitative feedback from specific groups or individuals that you may not generally hear from.

SURVEYS

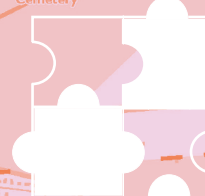Conducting surveys can help gauge trends and characteristics of the community as a whole.

Surveys can be answered anonymously and can allow respondents to answer with more honesty and less ambiguity.

Surveys are usually free or relatively inexpensive. Online surveys and mobile surveys, in particular, have a very small cost per respondent.

STORY-TELLING

Storytelling is a powerful way to communicate a message to your audience.

Whether you are trying to stir up a crowd or see eye-to-eye with your audience, storytelling can make your audience feel like a part of the situation.

Communal storytelling offers the listeners a way to learn vicariously and discover community values, lessons and develop awareness on their own.

OPEN HOUSE
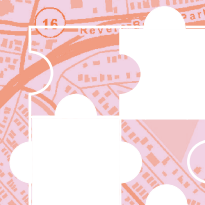
An open house brings the community together in a discussion around topics of difference or concern. Open houses can easily help establish connections between individuals, businesses, organizations and groups in the community.

They allow for two-way communication between leaders and members where individuals have the opportunity to present information and concerns to a large audience.

SURVEYS

Outline your parameters: Define the sample size and the type of survey you want to use - postal, drop, telephone or interview.

Be concise: Respondents are less likely to complete long surveys, or surveys that bounce around topic to topic. Vague or poorly worded questions confuse respondents and make your data less useful.

Order and time: Every question in the survey should play a purpose. Make sure your survey follows a logical order and doesn't take too long to complete.

Avoid asking biased questions: Some descriptive words and phrases may interject bias into your questions, or point the respondent in the direction of a particular answer. Avoid this by getting others to review your survey.

Language matters: Use language that your respondents will understand. Make words and sentences as simple as possible but also avoid oversimplifying a question to the point that it will change the way the question will be interpreted.

Pilot: Pilot your survey design and make sure it is reviewed prior to disseminating widely.

FOCUS GROUP

Time: Ideally a focus group should range from 45 to 90 minutes in length.

Who: The group should share similar interests, identities, affiliations etc. based on the goal or outcome desired from the focus group. This will assure you are spending your time wisely.

Set up: Have pre-set questions (about 8) you would like to ask participants, however keep the conversation free flowing. The questions should be short and concise.

Format: A typical format would include introductions, a short ice breaker question, open dialogue, closing and next steps. Do not forget to include food and snacks.

How many: It usually takes more than one focus group on any one topic to produce results. You'll know you've conducted enough groups (with the same set of questions) when you're not hearing anything new anymore. 3-4 focus groups tends to be a good number.

OPEN HOUSE

Registration: Keep track of people attending so that you know who is coming into your event.

Set up stations: Create activity stations where participants can give feedback on ideas and add their own.

Provide handouts: Posters, handouts and other visuals are key to showcasing project plans or information you may be interested in showcasing. These visual tools will help to reach more people in addition to presenting information verbally to your group.

Fun! Open houses should be fun and should include important amenities such as food, music, and a childrens table with activities.

Send thank yous! Thank participants and send any follow up information including a summarization of the event and additional notes and feedback that was collected. Include next steps or relevant resources to keep the public involved.

STORYTELLING

Story selection: Think about the kinds of stories you want to gather and tell. Make sure the stories have a purpose. Use the stories to build on trust and relationships.

Values: Every story will have assigned values based on your messaging. It should be easy for your audience to read/see what you believe. Work with the community to identify what those values are and present them back in your story.

Parts of a story to cover : Acknowledge the past, comment on the present and discuss the future.

Presentation: There are a variety of ways to tell a story including conversation using a whiteboard, video, story interviews, graphics and text, postcards, artwork and installations, story circles, and billboards. Pick one based on your audience, budget and purpose.

Connecting people: Get people to interact with the story. Perhaps use sticky notes to document people's reactions and point out similar themes. This will help people find a common ground especially in a public setting.

PARTNERSHIPS

Community partnerships can make your engagement practice more effective.

Partnership is often used in civic engagement to talk about relationships between individuals or groups that share resources, knowledge and other assets to achieve mutual goals.

Like any relationship, it takes time to develop and cultivate. Partnerships can be a great support system for events, trainings and initiatives.

HONORARIUMS

An honorarium is a payment (cash or gift card) that recognizes and acknoledges those that support you. It is a way to give back to your community and supporters.

We use honorariums support organizations, individuals and self-managed groups to sustain their community efforts and provide them with additional freedom to act in favor of their goals in the future.

Honorariums/stipends help build trust and establish long term partnerships between partners, residents and groups in the community.

EMPOWER

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ADVISORY COMMITTEES

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

Community advisory committees are commonly formed to involve the public in making decisions about planning and development.

The advisory committee's goal is to cultivate community leaders that are informed, protocol driven and represent members in the decision-making process.

Advisory committees can vary in management and function depending on the agencies and communities they represent.

Participatory budgeting (PB) is an interactive way to manage public money and to engage people in leadership.

It is a democratic process in which community members directly decide how to spend part of a public budget.

The process was first developed in Brazil in 1989, and there are now over 1,500 participatory budgets around the world. Most of these are at the city level, but some have been used for public agencies like housing authorities, school systems, universities and coalitions.

EMPOWER

EMPOWER

HONORARIUMS

Develop clear goals: Identify what you want the community partner to do. Think about the engagement opportunity and assess if this work will benefit both sides.

Pricing: Pricing can be determined by various means. Look at your budget, timeline and level of impact you are hoping to achieve at the end of your engagement activity. If it is a higher level of engagement consider a larger stipend as a key component of this work.

Payment: Pay your partner promptly to secure trust and develop credibility and reliability for your agency or group.

PARTNERSHIPS

Identify partners: Make a list of partners; categorize and prioritize partners that would help you achieve your current goal.

Listen to needs: Make interpersonal and professional connections with partners to understand their motivation, assets, needs, goals and objectives.

Merge concepts: Deepen interpersonal and professional connection and build a plan to work together that is mutually beneficial.

Act on partnership: Balance and share power when co-hosting events and projects. Provide opportunities for open and constant feedback.

Debrief: Once the engagement has occurred, review things that went well and ways to improve for next time. Exchange outreach lists, contacts, images, video and other engagement outputs.

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

Though each paticipatory budgeting experience is different, most follow a similar basic process:

• Residents brainstorm spending ideas
• Volunteer budget delegates develop proposals based on ideas
• Residents vote on proposals
• Government agency implements the top projects

For example, if community members identify recreation spaces as a priority, their delegates might develop a proposal for basketball court renovations. The residents would then vote on this and other proposals, and if they approve the basketball court, the city pays to renovate it.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Why: Advisory committees provide consistent participation, transparency in the decision-making process, and sharing of information between members.

Create clear expectations: Define committee roles and responsibilities in order to set the group up for success. Committee members can feel frustrated if they do not understand their role. Expectations about a committee's role need to be aligned with your needs, the community's participation culture, and available resources.

Select committee members: Make sure members represent different viewpoints and are balanced. The size of the committee also plays an important role.