



Community Engagement: New Models, Old Rules or Old Models, New Rules?

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Speakers

Shari Davis is Co-Executive Director of the Participatory Budgeting Project (PBP), a national nonprofit organization that empowers people to decide together how to spend public funds. She joined PBP after nearly 15 years of service and leadership in local government. As Director of Youth Engagement and Employment for the City of Boston she launched Youth Lead the Change, the first youth participatory budgeting process in the US, which won the US Conference of Mayors' City Livability Award. Shari first got involved in city government in high school, serving as the Citywide Neighborhood Safety Coordinator on the Boston Mayor's Youth Council and working at the Mayor's Youthline. Shari is a graduate of Boston University's Sargent College for Health and Rehabilitation Sciences and holds a master's degree in anatomy and physiology.

Mayor Sherman Lea, Sr. was elected Mayor of the City of Roanoke on May 3, 2016. Mayor Lea began his political career as a member of Roanoke City Council on July 1, 2004 and has served 12 consecutive years, holding the position of Vice- Mayor between 2008 and 2010. During his tenure, Mr. Lea has served as Chairperson of the Personnel Committee, and member of the Audit and Legislative Committees. As a professional, Mr. Lea spent 36 years with the Virginia Department of Corrections assisting people with criminal convictions as they re-entered the community upon release from incarceration. His career dates back to 1976, when he began working as the Institutional Parole Officer with the Virginia Correctional Center for Women in Goochland. Mr. Lea later served as the Adult Probation and Parole Officer, from 1978 to 1984, working in Danville and Pittsylvania County. In 1984, he was named Chief Probation and Parole Officer becoming the first African American to hold that position in Virginia. Mr. Lea was promoted in 1992 to the Western Regional Director. Despite retirement in 2012, He continues to work with individuals seeking release from incarceration through his appointment in 2014 to the Virginia Parole Board by Governor Terry McAuliffe. Additionally, Mr. Lea is the founder and president of S.P. Lea & Associates, facilitating training sessions on topics including leadership, management theories and practices, and maintaining the skills needed to remain successful in our ever-changing work environment. He has facilitated workshops for various groups and at various institutions of higher learning to include the National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice and Virginia University of Lynchburg. Mr. Lea was awarded the 2010 William L. Hastie Award by the National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice (NABCI) and named the 2014 Citizen of the Year by the Gamma Alpha Chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in sociology from Virginia Union University and an honorary doctorate in Humane Letters for Humanitarian Work in the Community from Bethlehem Bible College.

Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba, Esq. is the son of two life-long community activists—the late Mayor Chokwe Lumumba and Nubia Lumumba. Throughout his life and career, he has maintained a consistent presence in community projects and displayed a genuine commitment to justice. Attorney Lumumba began his community work early on—serving as co-director of the Malcolm X Grassroots Day Camp and acting as an assistant coach for the Jackson Panthers Basketball Organization. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 2005 from Tuskegee University where he served as president of both the Pi Sigma Alpha Political Science Honor Society and the Tuskegee Political Science Association. As an undergraduate, Attorney Lumumba also represented the institution on a national level as a member of the Tuskegee Bio-Ethics Debate Team and was honored as the *2005 Gwendolyn M. Patton Student Scholar Activist*. Attorney Lumumba earned his juris doctorate and a certificate in sports & entertainment law from Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas in 2008. After law school, he immediately returned to Jackson, Mississippi and began his work as a junior associate at Lumumba,



Freelon, & Associates. In 2013, he launched his own firm—Lumumba & Associates—a firm “Dedicated to Community. Invested in Justice.” As a founding member of the Mississippi Human Rights Collective, he co-organized the “Stand Up to Take It Down” rally at the State capitol to support the removal of the confederate insignia from the Mississippi State flag. He currently serves as the media representative of the Coalition for Economic Justice and is an active member of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement. His talent for organizing has been a vital component to previous city elections. Attorney Lumumba also acted as a campaign coordinator for his father’s successful bid for Mayor in 2013 and was instrumental in co-crafting The People’s Platform. Attorney Lumumba is a faithful member of Free Christian Ministries and serves on the church’s leadership team. His lifelong objective is to continue to struggle on behalf of oppressed peoples worldwide, so that they may eventually obtain the self-determined lives they so justly deserve. He firmly supports the concepts of community and family and the belief of the community as a family and pledges to do all that he can to make that concept live. Chokwe Antar is married to Ebony Lumumba and the couple has two daughters, Alake’ Maryama and Nubia Ngozi.

Jon Robinson is Deputy City Manager for the City of West Sacramento, California. His responsibilities include management of the City’s Innovation, Governmental Relations, and Communications programs, as well as special projects. He holds an MPPA from California State University Sacramento, and has also worked in affordable housing and redevelopment during a career spanning 27 years.



The First Steps to Meaningful Community Engagement

BY [NEERAJ MEHTA](#) | OCTOBER 31, 2012



A town hall meeting in West Hartford, Conn.
Credit: [Sage Ross via Wikimedia Commons](#)

The question of how to meaningfully and authentically engage community members in planning and development efforts is both difficult and important. Achieving equitable neighborhood revitalization takes fusing the hopes, dreams, wisdom and creative problem-solving of community members with the expertise, resources and knowledge of planners, community developers, artists, public

officials, the private sector and others working to strengthen our communities.

Creating more sustainable solutions that effectively address tough local challenges will take new ways of community engagement while simultaneously building on the power of communities to create, as Bill Traynor [puts it](#), “homegrown, locally owned, action-oriented solutions to a neighborhood’s problems.”

Much of the challenge, as I see it, is based in reflection of what we actually believe about the public and about the role and value of engagement more broadly. There is a distinct difference between assessing people’s opinions or attitudes and actually sharing planning and decision-making responsibilities. There’s a difference between real partnerships and simply asking people to rubber-stamp decisions we’ve already made.

As it is, there too much placation, manipulation and tokenism in our engagement efforts. We ask people if they want a dishwasher or an air conditioner in their apartment (a fair question), but we don’t ask them what kind of affordable housing they want in their community (a different, but similarly good question). We ask people if they’d like a playground for their children without telling them that the other possibility for the site is a health care center. Too often, our efforts are centered on wanting people to participate without giving them the opportunity to make real decisions. We devalue investments in time and relationship building, which often leads to us more easily devalue the contributions and expertise of those we engage.

Sherry Arnstein captures our challenge well, [writing in 2006 article](#) that “[t]here is a critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power to affect the outcomes of a process.”

So, how do we do it? How do we move up the ladder of community engagement from disempowered opinion-gathering to collective problem-solving and shared decision-making? I am not an expert and do not pretend to have the three keys, or the four steps, or the two magical ways to achieve this type of engagement by Friday. Plus, the reality is that every community project needs a unique approach based on its context. But here are some principles that I think can guide us in the core of the work and elevate us above the technical realities of any specific situation:

Acknowledge our interdependence and need for increased diversity. We need to understand that the problem we may be trying to solve doesn’t only affect “those people over there” and not “these people over here.” As we become more comfortable with our growing interdependence, the goal of our engagement efforts can be better focused on how, in working together, we draw upon the differing expertise, wisdom and experiences of different kinds of people, sectors and ideas. By bringing together the richness provided by differing perspectives, interpretations and ideas, we begin to capitalize on a growing awareness that diversity trumps individual ability, and that our futures are more connected than we like to believe.

Be honest with the complexity. As soon as we have to work with and even share power with people from different cultures, geographies, educational backgrounds or sectors, the more complicated work begins. Working within this complexity requires us to ask different questions and to value different things. The need to develop more trusting relationships and a shared analysis about our work together may need to trump speed and efficiency. Questions centered on simple data may need to be balanced with questions that require much more of us, like “How it is we want to be together?” and “What is it we want to create together?”

Be comfortable with uncertainty and controversy. Defining problems and coming up with solutions becomes that much harder as we try to understand the complicated ways in which our interdependence is blurring the lines of our previously compartmentalized notions of the world. Answers don’t come as easily, and when they do they come with lots of questions attached.

Neeraj Mehta is a member of Next American City’s [2012 Vanguard class](#), director of community-based research at the [Center for Urban and Regional Affairs](#) at the University of Minnesota and 2011 Bush Foundation Leadership Fellow.

THE LADDER OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN THE DIGITAL ERA

WIETSE VAN RANSBEECK
27TH JUL '16

Citizen participation refers to the process during which citizens are given the opportunity to participate in the public decision-making process. The government can decide to what extent the citizen's opinion will be taken into account. In this article, we explore the five different levels of citizen participation and ask ourselves the question: "how do they look like in the digital era?".

Although one might think that citizen participation is a time-consuming and expensive activity, it has a lot of very beneficial sides that overpower the downsides. A high level of citizen participation can provide more ideas on public issues, public support for decisions and therefore avoidance of conflicts. Besides that, more trust and cooperation can be created between the government and the public through civic participation.

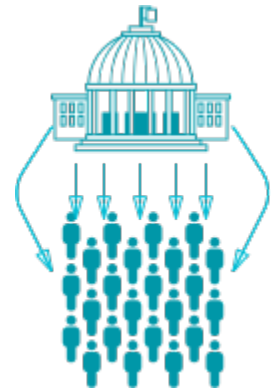
1. Inform

What? This is the lowest level of citizen participation. At this level, the government keeps the public informed of their rights and responsibilities. It also provides them objective information and informs them about decisions that have been made in order to strengthen the public understanding. One could state that this level has the goal of creating public awareness.

How? Communication is done through the media, pamphlets, posters, and websites.

Drawback? Merely informing the citizens boils down to a unidirectional flow of information. There is no channel for feedback, nor negotiation for the public. Besides, the quality of the information provided is often of a low quality and superficial, which doesn't encourage citizen participation in the end.

And in the digital era? In the online world, informing goes hand in hand with having a city website online on which citizens can stay informed. But it stops there.



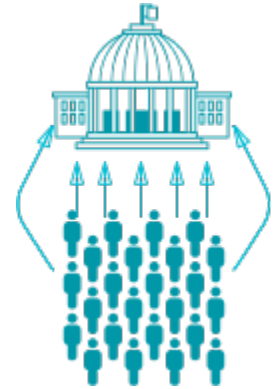
2. Consult

What? Beyond informing the public, the government can also ask for feedback. The citizen's opinion is valued. This is unfortunately often used as a smokescreen in order to keep the citizens happy while their opinion is not actually taken into account.

How? Consulting the citizens can be done via surveys, offline neighbourhood meetings, public hearings and focus groups.

Drawback? The main disadvantage of this method is the lack of certainty that the citizens will eventually influence the decision. The effectiveness of consulting citizens' opinion is regularly measured by the number of citizens coming to town hall meetings or filling in a hard-to-find questionnaire. As a city, the scope of citizens you're reaching out to is limited this way (younger and busier people are often missed out on using consultations). Also, a citizen can submit idea, but who will ever know how its idea is processed in this black box?

And in the digital era? Your residents have at least access to communicate their ideas digitally, in one way or another. The most basic degree of consulting is that they can fill in a form on the city's website.



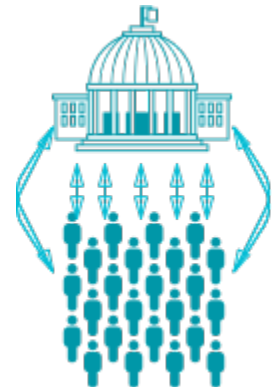
3. Involve

What? The influence of the citizen's opinion is higher at this level. The public has more say in the decision, but ultimately the government decides how to take into consideration the advice. Nevertheless, citizens' voices are heard and taken into account by the government.

How? Involving citizens can be done through boards, advisory or planning committees, and workshops.

Drawback? At this level, the power stays with the government. Even though they are taking into account citizens' ideas, the government can always contest its feasibility and decide not to implement them.

And in the digital era? Involving citizens goes beyond merely consulting their opinion; i.e. a two-directional way of engagement is established. Often times, a voting mechanism is used to let other citizens assess the ideas of citizens.



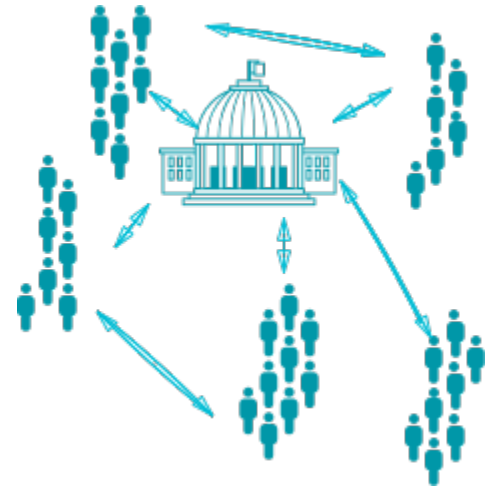
4. Collaborate

What? At this degree of participation, the power is shared between the government and the public as if they were partners. Namely, they collaborate on feasible solutions. The planning and decision-making is acted upon together in order to take into account both opinions and advices to come to a final decision.

How? This form of participation can be undertaken via joint policy boards, citizen advisory committees or online participation platforms.

Drawback? More opinions to take into account can slow down the decision-making process. Yet, there are many (online) means available to process the rich diversity of ideas in an resource-efficient way.

And in the digital era? In comparison to the involvement level, a collaboration between citizens and (city) government encompasses the possibility to give feedback to each others' ideas. In the first place, citizens can discuss the ideas of fellow ideas. Next to that, the government gives feedback to the ideas of citizens. Although this might seem a tedious task at the beginning, most of it can be automated if using the right tool.



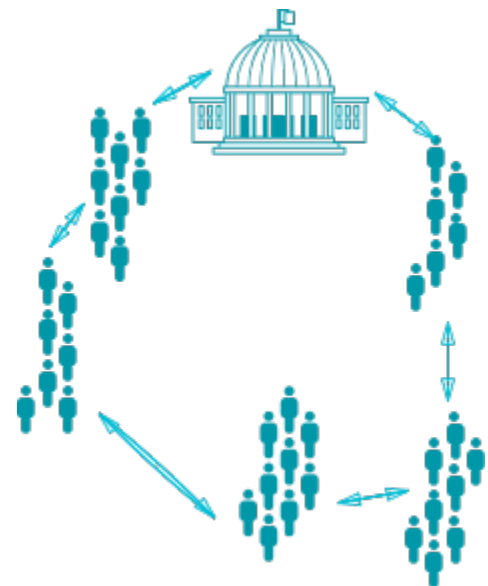
5. Empower

What? The highest level of citizen participation is when the citizen has the dominant decision over the government. Citizens have the veto right. Therefore, the government will have to implement the decision of the citizens.

How? Citizen juries, ballots and delegated decisions are means to empower the citizens.

Drawbacks? Level 5 represents the highest possible level of citizen participation, but it is rarely reached. This is often due to the extensive number of resources that is needed to put such a form of participation in place.

And in the digital era? From an online perspective, the empowerment of citizens is action-oriented and gives them the means to start executing.



Citizen participation made easy

Citizen participation can be implemented at various levels and with various means. An effective citizen participation process would benefit both the government and the citizens. In other words, there isn't such a thing as a one-size-fits-all solution. Nevertheless, it is clear that, thanks to digital solutions available today, governments are more and more providing their citizens toolkits to voice their opinions and get them engaged.

Sources: E-Participation Index by UNPACS (2014), IAP2 Spectrum of Participation, Ladder of Citizen Participation by Arnstein (1969)



AUTHOR

Wietse Van Ransbeeck

Founder of CitizenLab. On a mission to shape local democracies for the digital age. Proud Forbes 30 Under 30 Europe & YTIIL Fellow. Talk to me about #Brussels, #Europe, civic tech, philosophy, public policy on Twitter @WietseVR.

INCLUSIVE OUTREACH AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

“The Race and Social Justice Initiative is not a single project, but an ongoing commitment to a new way of doing business, of working to overcome institutional racism and create the kind of community where equity in opportunity exists for everyone.”

– Mayor Mike McGinn



**ADVANCE OPPORTUNITY.
ACHIEVE EQUITY.**

April 2009 (Rev. 01/11/12)

Seattle Office for Civil Rights, 810 Third Avenue, Suite 750, Seattle, WA 98104, (206) 233-5199
seattle.gov/rsji

1. OVERVIEW

Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement

In 2005, Mayor Nickels established the Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI). The mission of RSJI is to end institutionalized racism in City government and promote multiculturalism and full participation by all residents.

To this end, in 2008 Mayor Nickels released Executive Order 05-08 on Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement that commits all City departments to developing and implementing outreach and public engagement processes inclusive of people of diverse races, cultures, gender identities, sexual orientations and socio-economic status. This policy is designed to increase access to information, resources and civic processes by people of color and immigrant and refugee communities through the implementation of racially and culturally inclusive outreach and public engagement processes. The Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement Execution Order:

- A) Acknowledges the barriers that people of color and immigrant and refugee communities experience in accessing City government or participating in public process.
- B) Recognizes diversity as both a strength and opportunity.
- C) Affirms that a healthy democracy requires outreach and public engagement that takes into account our communities' racial, cultural, and socio-economic complexity.

Inclusive public engagement is about building strong and sustainable relationships and partnerships. One of the key components of making our public engagement processes responsive, inclusive and culturally appropriate is building the capacity of City staff to understand the implications of race, culture, and socio-economic status on public process. This guide is designed to provide City staff with the tools to:

1. Create effective public processes and forums with opportunities for communities of color to fully participate.
2. Identify the impacts of institutionalized racism and cultural complexity on public process.
3. Identify and use instruments that help select racially and culturally appropriate public processes.
4. Identify strategies to generate increased interest and involvement in the entire spectrum of government processes and services.
5. Identify and use culturally appropriate stakeholder and data analysis tools that recognize and utilize communities' cultural assets and knowledge.

2. INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT

THREE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Enhance Relationships & Engagement:

There is a greater likelihood of engagement from underserved communities when organizations take steps to enhance their relationships with those populations. Creating trusting relationships, increasing accessibility to facilities and services, and providing diverse opportunities to become involved, are key actions that reflect on organizational attitudes and values about developing equitable and sustainable engagement.

Enrich Knowledge Gathering:

Strengthening connections with communities through knowledge gathering allows those constituents to play a key role in determining relevance and appropriateness of organizational programming. We must look beyond surveys as a means of gathering crucial data and feedback towards more personalized modes and means of this important task. In essence, exchanging information, rather than collecting it, provides an incentive for engaging in conversations and collaborations, as well as a greater sense of ownership in the outcome.

Embrace Organizational Change:

In order for community engagement to flourish, organizations (and individuals that represent those organizations) must be open to organizational changes that are responsive to community insight and allow for shared power between communities and the organizations that serve them. The process and results of increased community engagement must go beyond activities to involve more community members, but rather become a prominent organizational value that drives everyday decision-making processes.

Goals of Public Engagement

- ☐ Empower communities to make decisions for themselves
- ☐ Release the capacity and potential of communities
- ☐ Change relationships between service providers and communities

Racially and Culturally Appropriate Public Engagement Delivers Results

- ☐ Better quality and responsive services and better outcomes
- ☐ Reduction of inequalities and greater ownership
- ☐ A better understanding of why and how services need to change and develop

Challenges of Implementing Racially and Culturally Appropriate Public Engagement

- ☐ Relationship changes are time consuming
- ☐ Difficult to measure and undermine original power structure
- ☐ Conflict is inevitable

*Reference: Emmel and Conn (2004), Hudson, (1999), London Department of Health, (2002)

CULTURAL COMPETENCY CONTINUUM

What is the Continuum?

The cultural competency continuum represents a spectrum into which we can place behaviors, attitudes, policies, and practices. This is intended to be a dynamic tool, since there is always room for growth and development in individuals, organizations, and institutionalized policies and practices.

Why do we use the Ladder?

In assessing our capacity for cultural responsiveness, it is useful to have a tool that is focused on core ways to interpret the wide range of behaviors and attitudes that are expressed in the policies and practices of an organization. This tool provides the means to assess cultural relevance in current operational standards, as well as the framework to guide progression towards fully integrated institutionalization.

How can we use the Ladder to impact our work?

Issues stemming from race and other cultural matters are quite broad and varied. Individuals and organizations will find that they are quite knowledgeable and proficient in some aspects of cultural consideration, and yet, may neglect asking crucial questions in another area. For instance, we may be acutely aware of making focus group (or other) accommodations for the hearing impaired community, but may not have a cache of options to make public health programs accessible to the P'urhépechan community (an indigenous Central American group that relies heavily on oral communication - Spanish is not their native language). When we begin to consider our approach to engagement with this community, we can gauge why mainstream strategies will have a lower effectiveness and work from a more culturally responsive foundation. Ultimately, the more our work stems from relevant aspects of racial and cultural identity, the greater our chances for effective outcomes and increased engagement from that community.

Please Read

It is important to note that the examples in Blindness and Pre-Competence can be used as pieces in a more comprehensive approach to public engagement. It is intended that you use this ladder to consider alternate or additional strategies that reflect a culturally aware, multi-faceted approach to-wards more effective engagement.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE CONTINUUM

STAGE	CULTURAL DESTRUCTIVENESS	CULTURAL INCAPACITY	CULTURAL BLINDNESS	CULTURAL PRE-COMPETENCE	CULTURAL COMPETENCE
	Where people actively belittle other cultures	Where people show no interest in or appreciation of other cultures	Where people treat all cultures as if they were the same	Where people have acceptance and respect for difference, and continue self-assessment	Where people unconsciously hold culture in high esteem, and use this to guide their lives/work
ASSUMPTIONS	- Forced assimilation - Rights and privileges for only dominant group "We deserve this" "This is the ONLY and RIGHT way"	- Lower expectations - Maintain stereo-types "People choose not to be a part of the process" "This is just the way we do it here"	- Differences ignored "treat everyone the same" - Need/Problem based "I don't see color, we are all just the same" "just give me a checklist"	- Seeks advice/consultation - Identifies what they are NOT capable of doing "Let's just hire an expert" "Teach Me Phase"	- Recognizes individual and cultural difference - Develops new approaches "Let's work together to truly empower communities"
POWER DYNAMICS	Access and power are only given to a privilege group other members are purposely excluded	Education is still designed for privilege group and no accommodation is made to try to include other groups	No acknowledgement of power differences (institutional racism, classism, immigrant or refugee experience, etc.) power is still held by dominant group	Power differences are acknowledged, with some understanding but reliance on others ("experts")	Target community has a role (real power) in education design and application
EXAMPLES	- Exclusive Public Meetings "English Only" Approach	- Traditional "Town Hall" model - The "Bootstrap" Mentality	- Translated Newsletters - Multicultural Festivals	- Consult with or hire (one) member of an ethnic community - Special (one time) Programs	- Native American Art and Storytelling (target population designs process, holds real power) - Trusted Advocate Model (power sharing)

Adapted from: Cross, T.L., Bazron, B.J., Dennis, K.W., & Isaacs, M.R. (1989). Towards a culturally competent system of care volume 1: A monograph on effective services for minority children who are severely emotionally disturbed. Washington D.C. CASSP Technical Assistance Center, Georgetown University Child Development Center.

SIX ESSENTIAL STRATEGIES FOR INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT

Effective community engagement takes careful planning and acknowledgement that each population that we work with is a unique opportunity to broaden our understanding of what makes a community.

To help you think about ways to use each strategy, we have provided critical questions to consider, as well as successful examples to illustrate creative ways to connect with your target group.

1. Build personal relationships with target population

Q1 Are there key individuals or constituents you already have or should be building a relationship with?

Q2 Are there venues for you to attend or explore to find out who are natural community leaders?

- Informal/Community driven gatherings that are appropriate to attend
- Connect with the individuals in this community/population

2. Create a welcoming atmosphere

Q1 Does your process reflect, honor, and welcome the community?

Q2 Do the venues you choose invite participation and engagement?

- Hire staff or consultants from the community or that reflect the target population
- Choose gathering places that are comfortable and that are conducive to the interactions that you want to have

3. Increase accessibility

Q1 Are there issues/barriers (language, location, time, transportation, childcare, food, incentives, appeal, power dynamics, etc.) that should be considered throughout the whole process?

Q2 Are there ways to increase the level of input a community has in a process?

- Selecting the most appropriate and effective communication method to promote engagement opportunities
- Decrease barriers to attendance or effective communication at events

4. Develop alternative methods for engagement

Q1 Do you have non-traditional methods of outreach to get people involved?

Q2 Do you offer multiple ways for contributing input and feedback?

- Provide opportunities for social interaction and relationship building
- Provide opportunities for community members to give feedback in photographic, voice recorded, or video formats

5. Maintain a presence within the community

Q1 Are there community driven events that you can participate in and that people will already be gathering for?

Q2 Do community members see you out, regularly, in the community?

- Attend community driven events and activities (think non-traditional)
- Establish places in the community that people can have sustained, informal interactions with you

6. Partner with diverse organizations and agencies

Q1 Are there organizations that currently have relationships with your target populations that you can connect with (remember to consider power dynamics)?

Q2 Have any agencies or organizations successfully implemented similar programs or initiatives (perhaps on a smaller scale or in another community) that you can solicit advice from?

- Connect with organizations who are already culturally tied to the target community or are currently providing services to your target population
- Create a network of services that eliminate gaps or reduce redundancies for the target population

3. QUICK GUIDE

KEY STEPS TO INCLUSIVE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

What To Do	How To Do it
Define Scope of Work	Identify the decisions to be made and determine where and how the public can influence decisions – use this to define the public’s roles. Identify racial and ethnic population affected by the process or project. Does this project impact racial disparity? Institutional racism? Multiculturalism?
Identify Stakeholders	Identify the stakeholders. Who does this affect directly or indirectly, positively or negatively? Who is taking a risk, who has responsibility?
Define Roles	Define roles for the public, your department, and other stakeholders. Who else in your department is involved? How about other agencies? Other institutions and organizations in the community? Elected officials?
Incorporate Racially and Culturally Appropriate Engagement Activities	Assess scope of work for incorporating the six strategies for more inclusive engagement. Identify relationships with communities of color, create a welcoming atmosphere at all events, insure accessibility for all participants, develop alternative and culturally appropriate methods for engagement, maintain an ongoing presence in the community and develop partnerships with organizations or color.
Create an Inclusive Public Engagement Plan	Prepare a public engagement plan. Include key activities, milestones, and products on the project timeline. Develop a detailed work plan that includes specific engagement activities based on an overall strategy. Identify and make use of appropriate tools consistent with the defined roles, issues, audience, and resources. Be specific in creating goals for engaging racial and ethnic communities.

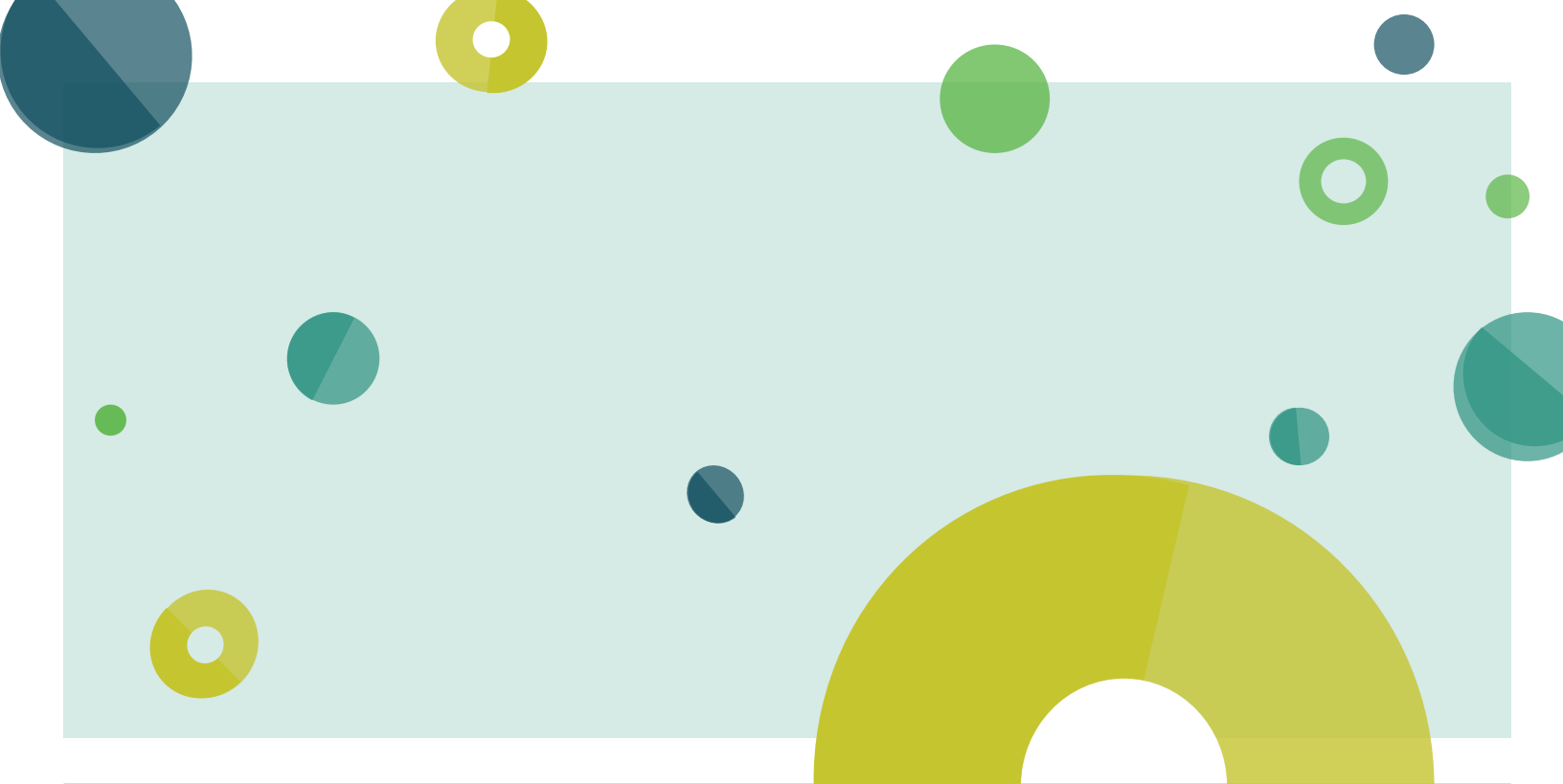
What To Do	How To Do it
Staffing & Organization	Designate a lead public involvement staff, key team member with project manager. Establish the staff/resource needs for public involvement at the outset – from communications staff, or outside facilitators and consultants. Include potential translation and interpretation costs. Identify an internal team to use for advice: Set up initial and regular times to meet with them for updates and advice.
Communications & Outreach	Create a clear identity and message for the project from the outset. Carry out broad outreach, using multiple communications tools to reach the diversity of stakeholders (e.g. mailed and printed information, website and email lists, cable TV and PSA's) Include targeted outreach to communities of color and other affected groups that tend not to participate (consultations with leaders; info at community events, speakers, etc.) Have a single contact point for the public (e.g. a hotline and/or email address) to provide easy access to the public to get information and provide input, on the project. Use the media strategically – press releases, feature stories, op-ed's, news conferences to announce initiation of project; key milestones and decision-points. Focus on community newspapers and programs, including ethnic media. Use public facilities – branch libraries, community centers, neighborhood service centers as information repositories to provide ongoing information on the project. Use technology to promote an interactive public process – use your agency/organization's website to provide information and opportunities for feedback through the life of the project.

What To Do	How To Do it
Decision Makers	Keep decision-makers informed – from reviewing the scope of the public involvement plan to updates after events/activities. Prepare and present a final report on the results of public involvement and how it has affected the project outcome – through periodic briefings.
Accessibility & Transparency	Make sure the process is open and accessible to all stakeholders – initial and ongoing outreach, communications, engagement activities and feedback. Ensure that the public involvement process is “transparent.” Make information accessible – project related information and results from public involvement and how it is being incorporated into the project process. Regular updates (on the Web posting, through newsletters or postcards, etc.) are an important way to do this. Staff contact and relationships with key stakeholder groups is also effective in providing transparency.
Evaluate the Process	Include evaluation of the overall process and of specific public activities -- It is critical to learn from your experience, replicating what works; changing what didn't work. Use evaluation forms at meetings/activities; online feedback to obtain information from stakeholders (not just the public, but other agency staff, institutions, etc. who are participating in the process). Track and record participation in the process by communities of color. Include results of the evaluation in your report to decision-makers.

5. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT MATRIX

Type of Engagement	Goal of Participation	Tools/Activities	Inclusive Engagement Techniques	Indicators/Evaluation
INFORM (required for all types of engagement)	Educate the public about the rationale for the project or decision; how it fits with City goals and policies; issues being considered, areas of choice or where public input is needed. <i>Message to the Public:</i> To keep everyone informed.	- <i>Fact Sheets</i> - <i>Brochures</i> - <i>Websites</i> - <i>Open Houses</i> - <i>Exhibits/displays</i> (in public areas) - <i>Newsletters</i> (mailed/online) - <i>Newspaper articles</i>	Translation of all key documents. Interpretation at events.	
CONSULT	Gather information and ask for advice from citizens to better inform the City's work on the project. <i>Message to the Public:</i> Will keep everyone informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	- <i>Focus groups</i> - <i>Surveys, interviews, and questionnaires</i> - <i>Public Meetings</i> - <i>door-to-door</i> - <i>Workshops and working sessions</i> - <i>Deliberative polling</i> - <i>Internet</i> (interactive techniques)	Translation of all key documents. Interpretation at events. Provision of Childcare. Culturally appropriate food. Individual meetings with community leaders.	

Type of Engagement	Goal of Participation	Tools/Activities	Inclusive Engagement Techniques	Indicators/Evaluation
COLLABORATE	Create a partnership with the public (key stakeholder groups) to work along with the City in identifying problems, generating solutions, getting reactions to recommendations and proposed direction. <i>Message to the Public:</i> Will work with the public to ensure that their concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and show how public input influenced the decision.	- <i>Citizen Advisory Committee/ Liaison Groups</i> - <i>Visioning</i> - <i>Consensus building</i> - <i>Participatory decision-making</i> - <i>Charrettes</i> - <i>Implementation Committee</i>	Translation of all key documents. Interpretation at events. Provision of Childcare. Culturally appropriate food. Individual meetings with community leaders.	
SHARED DECISION-MAKING	Decision-makers delegate decision-making power to stakeholders or give them a formal role in making final recommendations to be acted upon. <i>Message to the Public:</i> Will implement what the public decides.	- <i>Citizen juries</i> - <i>Ballots</i> - <i>Delegated decisions to specific representative citizen body or to voters</i>	Translation of all key documents. Interpretation at events. Provision of Childcare. Culturally appropriate food. Individual meetings with community leaders.	



PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING: **Next Generation Democracy**

*How innovative leaders are reaching
more people, bridging community divides,
& making government work*



PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING PROJECT

Executive Summary

Why Participatory Budgeting?

In a time of rising civic disengagement, many city leaders are using an innovative tool to reconnect with the people they serve: Participatory budgeting, known as “PB.” PB is a democratic process that gives ordinary people direct control over a portion of a public budget. It empowers residents, engages them in finding solutions, and knits communities together. Leaders in more than 3,000 cities and municipalities have implemented PB, for three main reasons:

- **It’s Effective Leadership.** The process motivates broad participation, and engages communities in finding solutions that respond to community needs. *See page 2.*
- **It’s Fair Leadership.** PB engages a true cross-section of the community. More people get inspired and active, including those who often can’t or don’t participate, like youth. *See page 10.*
- **It’s Visionary Leadership.** By supporting their communities to become more resilient and connected, officials who do PB build a legacy as bold and innovative leaders. *See page 14.*



At the Participatory Budgeting Project, we often hear from leaders who want more information about PB, both to guide their own decisions and to help convince their elected colleagues and city officials. We have tailored this white paper with these two goals in mind. Drawing on both academic research and on-the-ground experience, this paper complements the vast number of existing resources on PB by offering a high-level overview tailored specifically for city leaders. Stories are drawn from our experience supporting processes in cities including:



“It’s one of the most popular things I’ve ever done. When I ran

for re-election, my campaign

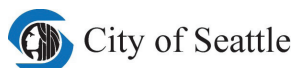
commissioned a poll of likely voters,

and one of the things we measured was voters’ feelings about PB. The poll confirmed what I knew instinctively—PB was incredibly popular. Four years earlier, I barely got re-elected, garnering only 51% of the vote. In the next election—after I adopted PB—I won 72%. There are a lot of reasons for my political comeback, but PB played a major role.”

—JOE MOORE, Alderman of Chicago’s 49th Ward



CITY OF BOSTON
Office of the Mayor



Introduction

It's a hard time to work in city government.

Just ask Marti Brown. When she was elected to city council in Vallejo, California, the city was in bankruptcy. Foreclosure signs dotted neighborhoods. Vital services were operating on shoestring budgets, and many residents had lost hope in their hometown. “Anyone who could leave was leaving,” Brown says of the time.

People are disconnected from the tough choices of public service.

It's not just Vallejo. Most city leaders are facing slashed budgets, shrinking revenue, and widespread mistrust of their work.

“Just 19% [of Americans] say the government is run for the benefit of all.”

—Pew Research Center¹

Elected office is an overtime job (and often on a part-time salary). People rarely understand the nuanced compromises that leaders have to make. Many believe our democracy is no longer fair.

In this climate, participatory budgeting offers a way to re-engage.

Brown was searching for solutions when she heard about Chicago Alderman Joe Moore. A 20-year veteran of Chicago's City Council, Moore witnessed first-hand his constituents' growing disenchantment with all levels of government. To address his community's frustration, Moore implemented participatory budgeting, or PB. “It's the most popular thing I've ever done,” Moore says. Through PB, Moore created deep engagement with his community; eight other Chicago City Council Wards have since followed suit. Inspired by Moore's success, Brown and her colleagues decided to bring PB to Vallejo. Here's what happened.

Participatory Budgeting has been endorsed by:



PIIONEERED BY THE
ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION
100 RESILIENT CITIES



PolicyLink



¹ Pew Research Center, “Beyond Distrust: How Americans View their Government,” 11/23/15

① EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Getting Results

Vallejo voters had recently approved a new 1% sales tax. Of course, Brown and her colleagues had a lot of ideas for how to spend that revenue. But the tax passed by the slimmest margin; it was clear that residents did not want the new revenue spent in the same old way.

Participatory budgeting offered a new way out of a cycle of taxing, spending, and frustration.

The council decided to do a PB pilot, allocating one-third of the tax (about \$3.28 million) directly to residents' control, integrated into the broader budget decision-making process. PB created a new, effective partnership between the City and the people of Vallejo.

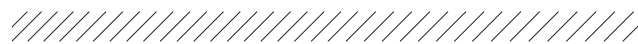
Instead of just spending, Vallejo was investing.

The process drew a wide coalition of residents who were eager to contribute to new solutions. City staff, too, were energized by the collaboration. PB started to rebuild trust and created programs that are benefiting the city today.



“This city has been so eaten up, people feel like so much has been taken from them. Here’s something we can give back.”

—MARTI BROWN, *former City Councilmember, who spearheaded bringing PB to Vallejo, CA*



How participatory budgeting works

PB involves an annual cycle of meeting and voting, integrated into the broader budget decision-making process. Each city adapts PB to its specific needs, but it generally follows these steps:

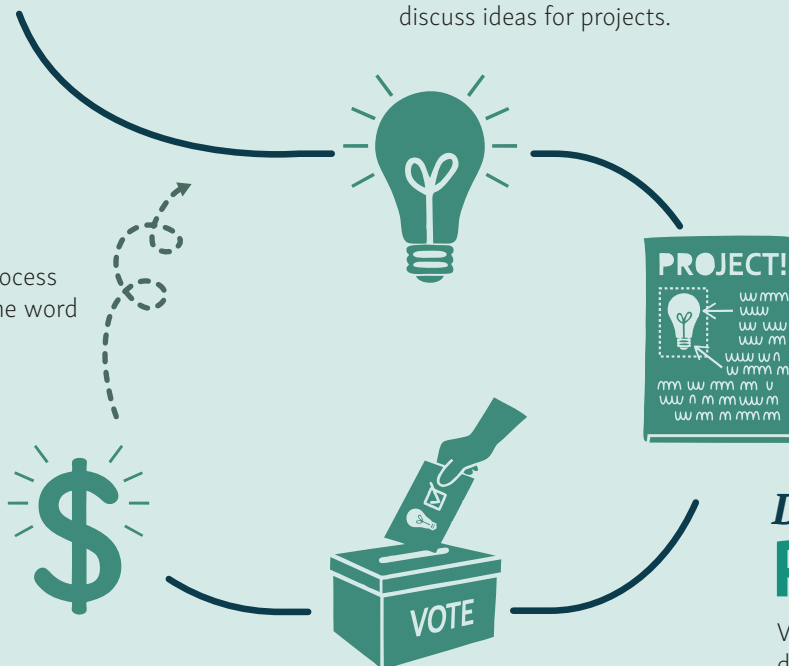
Design the Process

A steering committee, representative of the community, creates the rules in partnership with city officials to ensure the process is inclusive and meets local needs.

Brainstorm Ideas

Through meetings and online tools, city residents share and discuss ideas for projects.

Iterate the process and spread the word for next year!



Fund Winning Projects

The city implements the winning projects, such as laptops in schools, Wi-Fi in public parks, or traffic safety improvements. The city and residents track and monitor implementation.

Cast a Vote

Residents vote to divide the available budget between the proposals. It's a direct, democratic voice in their city's future.

Develop Proposals

Volunteers, usually called budget delegates, develop the ideas into feasible proposals, which are then vetted by city experts.

QUICK FACTS

PB VALLEJO

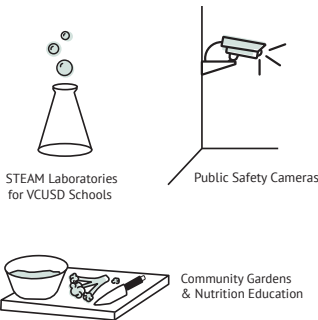
POPULATION: **119,000** approx.

PB ALLOCATION: **\$3.28 million**

DEMOGRAPHICS: One of the nation's most diverse cities, with approximately *equal percentages* of White, Black, Latino, and Filipino populations.

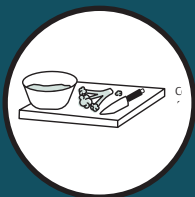
GOVERNMENT: 6 nonpartisan, part-time Councilmembers, elected at-large; Mayor elected separately

FUNDED PROJECT EXAMPLES:



“I spoke against PB at Vallejo’s City Council in January 2012, as I was of the mindset that our elected officials have the responsibility to manage the city’s resources... [But after research] I became convinced that in order to change the message about Vallejo, the residents here needed to step up and become part of something much greater than ourselves.”

—JOHNNY WALKER, 14-year resident of Vallejo, CA and representative of local businesses, who later joined the PB Vallejo Steering Committee



SOLUTIONS SPOTLIGHT: COMMUNITY GARDENS & NUTRITION EDUCATION

Cities everywhere wrestle with issues like crime, education, and community cohesion. The residents of Vallejo came up with a new solution: With \$146,500 allocated through PB, and the support of 9 implementing partners

from civic organizations, Vallejo developed 9 community gardens across the city, safe spaces to grow food, beautify neighborhoods, educate kids, and decrease crime.



Participatory budgeting can be done with a portion of any existing budget—new funding is not required.

Vallejo’s sales tax was a special opportunity, but most cities implement PB with existing budgets. PB is a powerful way to get the most “bang for the buck” out of limited resources, because it directly addresses community needs, and because communities pitch in to find cost-effective ways to get results.

Participatory Budgeting Funding Sources

- City, county, or state budgets
- Housing authority or other public agency budgets
- School, school district, or university budgets
- Community Development Block Grants or other federal funds
- Community Benefit Agreements
- Tax Increment Financing (TIF)
- Discretionary funds of elected officials
- Non-governmental sources like foundations or non-profit organizations, if this money is oriented towards public or community projects

Pilots can start small and increase year-over-year. Many city leaders begin their first cycle with a moderate budget, such as \$1 million (smaller budgets deliver a lower return-on-investment for the implementation costs). In subsequent years, the PB budget should increase to drive greater participation and enthusiasm.

For every \$5 million that is directly allocated through PB, another \$1 million is raised through matching funds, in-kind contributions, and other sources.



How participatory budgeting makes government work better

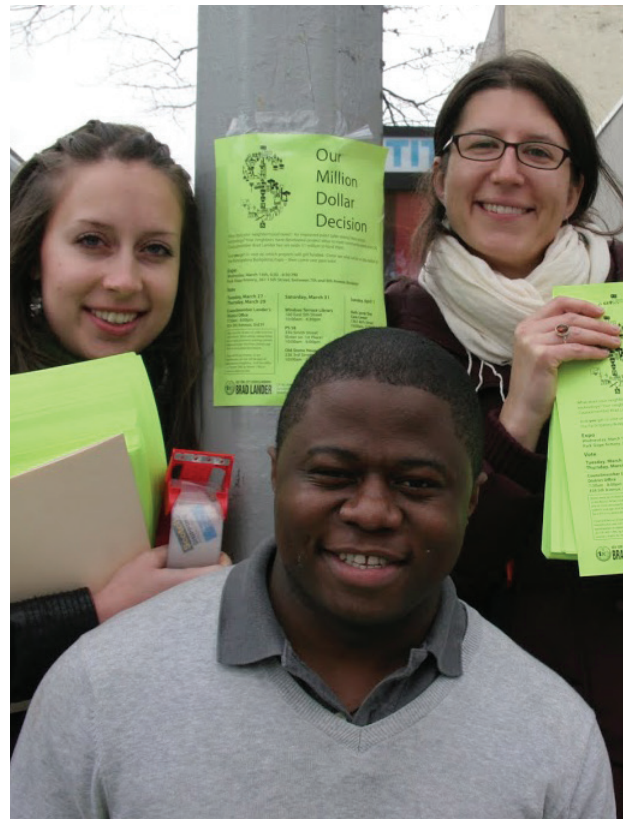
- **More people in the community work with government.** Hundreds of volunteers contribute their local knowledge and energy through PB, far beyond the “usual suspects.”
- **Officials and staff deliver better results.** City employees are motivated and held accountable by direct engagement with the people they serve.
- **Community members learn and find solutions together.** Residents develop empathy for the challenges their elected leaders face and come together to help find new ways to meet community needs.

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“I love the PB process. We haven’t seen this brightness, this synergy in years.”

—NIMAT SHAKOOR-GRANTHAM,
Code Enforcement Manager,
City of Vallejo, CA

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The White House endorses participatory budgeting.

Recognizing PB as a vital tool for civic engagement, the White House has promoted PB in its Open Government National Action Plan and at several national convenings. This has opened up new resources for PB, including the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) officially approving PB to allocate Community Development Block Grants (CDBG).



It quickly becomes a valuable listening tool, making government more responsive.

Many elected leaders who implement PB value it as a way to better “take the temperature” on public priorities and make government truly responsive. For example, in New York City, public school bathroom repairs were a frequent concern raised in several PB processes across the city. Council members took these concerns to heart and in 2014 pushed for and won a \$50 million increase in funding to improve school bathrooms citywide.

A Track Record of Success

Participatory budgeting is the world's longest running, widest-spread innovation in participatory democracy.

FIRST PB PROCESS PIONEERED IN Porto Alegre, Brazil

Research in Brazil later shows that 10 years of PB reduces infant mortality by 33% and increases the number of community organizations by 19%.

Chicago, IL

Alderman Joe Moore brings PB to the US for the first time, allocating \$1 million.

New York City, NY

4 City Councilmembers implement PB, allocating \$5.6 million.

2004
300 cities

2011
1,000 cities

1988

1989

2004

2009

2011

2012

Vallejo, CA

City Council launches the first city wide PB process in the US, dedicating \$3.2 million.

Washington, DC

The White House promotes PB as part of its Open Government National Action Plan.

St. Louis, MO

A coalition launches the city's first PB process.

Participatory Budgeting Project wins the inaugural Brown Democracy Medal.

Long Beach, CA

Councilmember Rex Richardson launches the first PB in Southern California.

//////
***An opportunity for
new leadership.***

As the movement and its track record grows, new cities can lead by investing more in PB and creating much bigger impacts.

2013
1,500 cities

2016
3,000+ cities

2013

2014

2015

2016

//////
PBNYC wins the Harvard Innovation in American Government Award.

Boston, MA

Boston Mayor Marty Walsh wins “Most Livable City” award for youth-led PB.

//////
New York City, NY

28 Districts allocate \$38 million.

Greensboro, NC

The first PB process in the US South starts after 5 years of grassroots organizing.

② FAIR LEADERSHIP

Engaging New Generations

In a time when most people feel that their government is not listening to them, PB is a tangible way to lift up all voices fairly. PB processes open up participation and voting to people who are typically disenfranchised or marginalized, including youth, non-citizen residents, and the formerly incarcerated. Participants as young as 10 or 12 years old can vote and develop a long term passion for civic engagement. PB inspires them because it is an experience of democracy that is truly for the people, by the people.

In Boston, participatory budgeting engages thousands of youth in the city's civic life.

Including youth in the democratic process was a priority for Mayor Marty Walsh, elected to serve Boston in 2013. Building on his predecessor's initial support for PB, Mayor Walsh allocated \$1 million of the capital budget to the first year of the Youth Lead the Change PB process in 2014.

The next generation of Boston is raising its voice.

By sharing power of significant funds, Mayor Walsh is establishing a legacy of participation and positive collaboration for the next generation. In Boston, the first year of Youth Lead the Change attracted 1,500 participants; more than 2,500 youth participated in the second year, and more than 4,500 participated in the third.

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“The Mayor is definitely approachable, and he cares about the future of the city.”



—LAILA MCCAIN, age 16, participated in Youth Lead the Change, a citywide PB process in Boston

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Boston, Massachusetts

QUICK FACTS

“YOUTH LEAD THE CHANGE” PB BOSTON

Boston implemented a citywide PB process in 2014, open to residents ages 12 to 25. By specifically engaging youth, Mayor Marty Walsh is fostering pride and engagement in the next generation of Boston leaders.

POPULATION: **650,000**
approx.

PB ALLOCATION: **\$1 million**
from the Mayor's Capital Budget

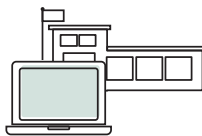
FUNDED PROJECT EXAMPLES:



Public Wi-Fi in parks



Water bottle refill stations



Laptops for schools

Award-Winning Leadership



Mayor Marty Walsh, 2015 Winner
“Most Livable City Award” for
Youth Lead the Change



“I’ve been in office now a little under two years, and to get this recognition in a short period of time has been very exciting, and great for the city of Boston.”

—MAYOR MARTY WALSH (D), *recipient of the 2015 “City Livability Award” from the U.S. Conference of Mayors for his youth-led PB process*





“I was proud to be the first elected official from Queens to give my constituents a real say in how their money is being spent... As I have always said, this isn’t my money, it is the taxpayers’ money and they should be allowed a say in how it’s spent.”

—ERIC ULRICH (R), *New York City Council, District 32*



Youth Voices: Developing the Habit of Engagement

“Actually, I came in for the free pizza...

(I was attracted by a sign that said ‘FREE PIZZA!’), but I stayed because I saw an opportunity to make a change. Before this, I had little to no experience in working with my community, but I had always been interested. When I saw the video about what a district in New York had done and what they had accomplished I thought, ‘I wanna do something like that.’

I now know I have the ability to help not just this community, but many more, and it is in part due to getting involved in the PB process. I want to see Vallejo progress towards a better future where people can say they were proud to grow up here.”

—JENNY AGUIAR, *a high school junior and budget delegate in Vallejo, CA*



Participatory budgeting connects leaders with a true cross-section of the community.

Voting is open to the entire community, even youth under 18. It is an effective way to reach out to all parts of the community, bridging historic geographic, economic, and partisan divides. Evaluations consistently show that PB processes reflect the true democratic makeup of a community.

And it produces actionable insights about all communities' priorities.

The majority of ideas suggested in the brainstorm phase of PB do not make it all the way through the vetting process and public vote. In Chicago in 2009, for example, out of hundreds of suggestions, 36 feasible projects made it onto the ballot, and 14 were awarded funding. Yet the hundreds of ideas that don't win funding are not wasted! They serve as valuable input for leaders and are often implemented through other funding sources or used to inform broader policy changes. Listening to all of the ideas and public debate through PB offers leaders up-to-date, nuanced insights into community needs and priorities.

In New York City, low-income residents represented 40% of participants in PB processes, compared with 29% for previous local elections.

How PB makes government more fair

Leadership in a democracy is not only about getting results—it's also about engaging and responding to all sides of your community. As cities struggle with deepening divisions between residents along lines of race, income, partisanship, and more, leaders need new ways to hear all sides.

③ VISIONARY LEADERSHIP

Designing the Future

True leadership is about lifting people up. That's what defined the campaign of Carlos Menchaca, in Brooklyn's 38th Council District in 2013. After years of alienation, residents felt that Menchaca was a leader who would really listen to them, as shown by the outpouring of public participation: In the primary, a higher number of people voted for Menchaca than the total number of people who voted in the previous primary. This wave of participation created history—Menchaca is the first Mexican-American on the New York City Council—and it is also creating the future.



“What I love about PB is that it brings new people into a leadership relationship with government. ...PB participants teach government to operate better because the outcomes directly impact their own community, their families, and themselves.”

—CARLOS MENCHACA (D), *New York City Council, District 38*
writing for the "Red Hook Star-Review," 3/17/2016



Broad participation is the future of democracy.

Menchaca's supporters did not rest once they had elected him. Supporters wanted to continue working to make their community better, they wanted to march side-by-side with Menchaca as he followed through on his campaign promises. By implementing PB, Menchaca created an opportunity for supporters to continue contributing their energy and excitement.

Through participation, participatory budgeting builds stronger communities.

People who get engaged in PB tend to stay engaged. The ability to contribute to tangible results through the process can be addictive; knowing that change is possible motivates people to push for more. New leaders emerge through PB and go on to organize other community movements that strengthen the city.

“We get to know our Council Member. Now I know what he looks like, not just his name. Usually we only see our elected officials when they need votes.”

—RESIDENT OF DISTRICT 39 in New York City,
interviewed during PBNYC 2015

QUICK FACTS

New York, New York

PBNYC

Four New York City Council members (three Democrats and one Republican) launched PB in their districts in 2011, empowering their constituents to decide how to invest at least \$1 million in each district. PBNYC has grown rapidly, with 31 districts participating in 2016.

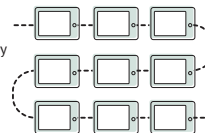
POPULATION: **8.4 million** approx.

PB ALLOCATION: **\$38 million**
total in 2016

FUNDED PROJECT EXAMPLES

(District 38):

Improving technology
in 9 local schools



Electronic arrival time
signs for bus routes



Sunset Park Renovation

COMMUNITIES DEVELOP NEW NETWORKS TO GET THINGS DONE

PB serves as a crash course in working with city government. People who have long struggled to get attention (such as public housing residents) connect directly with networks of power, learning

who to call and how to work the system for better outcomes. Residents learn to advocate for their communities in more effective and collaborative ways, often forming new coalitions.



INNOVATIVE WAYS TO CONNECT THE CITY TO THE PEOPLE: *Technology and PB*

Experimenting with technology through PB has given many elected officials an opportunity to extend their outreach and demonstrate leadership in open, accountable governance. In 2015, 83% of PB processes used online and digital tools to engage residents.²

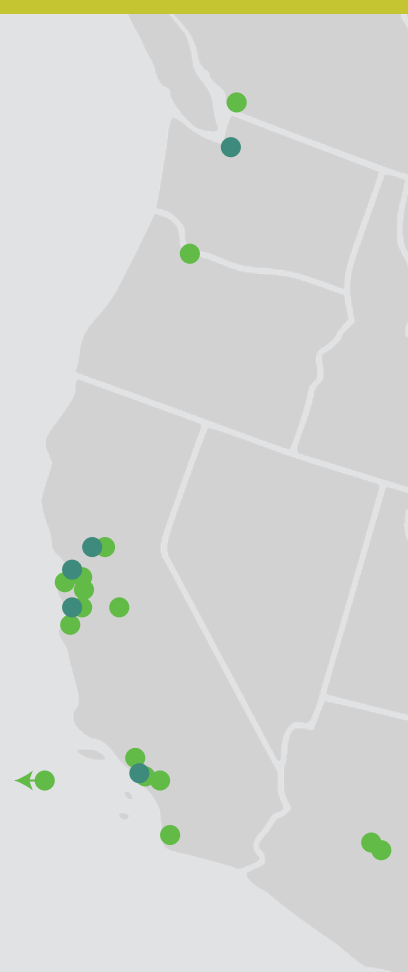
Some cities use PB as a “trial run” for digital engagement. In New York City, for example, the City Council launched a platform that allows New Yorkers to sign up to receive text message alerts about PB, as well as to spread the word to friends and neighbors. The Council is using this pilot to evaluate the potential of expanding text messaging for civic participation.³

Participatory budgeting spurs new innovations.

Leaders have big ideas, but even the most visionary leader needs the support of the people and the technical know-how of civil servants to bring great ideas into reality. PB is a tool that can make innovations possible. With multiple city agencies communicating through the hub of the PB process, with residents actively engaging with and supporting ideas, and with the guiding leadership of elected officials, the political calculus can change. In New York City, for example, residents in public housing developed a winning proposal to build a solar-powered greenhouse that will create job opportunities for youth and bring healthy food and nutrition education into the community.

Through participatory budgeting, leaders are creating their legacies.

The disconnect between communities and government is creating challenges for many city governments. But, visionary leaders are choosing a new path, through PB. They are building healthier, more effective democracies. They are building stronger communities. And as the dividends from PB compound, these visionary leaders are building their legacies.



² Public Agenda, 5/10/2016, “Public Spending, by the People.” Available: www.publicagenda.org/pages/public-spending-by-the-people

³ New York City Council, 2015, “Council 2.0.” Available: www.council.nyc.gov/html/tech/tech.shtml

Is it time to put your city on the map?





We're Here to Help!

Participatory Budgeting Project is the foremost expert on participatory budgeting in North America. We are a nonprofit organization that works across the US and Canada to empower people to decide together how to spend public money.

We provide technical assistance and training to implement successful PB processes and campaigns, develop new tools to make PB better, and host conferences and information exchanges to share best practices. We have supported over 17 cities and institutions to launch PB, and our work has enabled 240,000 people to decide how to invest \$167,000,000 in public funds.

To learn more about PB or request a strategy meeting about starting PB in your community, please contact info@participatorybudgeting.org or visit:

www.participatorybudgeting.org

Acknowledgments

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BUILDING BETTER CITIES WITH CIVIC TECHNOLOGY

THE ROLE OF ENGAGEMENT IN INFRASTRUCTURE DELIVERY

BY [KATE GASPARRO](#) • NOVEMBER 8, 2018

Rising levels of urbanization in the United States are **putting demand on new and existing infrastructure**. As cities grow and local demographics change, it is becoming more difficult for local governments to make timely decisions regarding the built environment. Infrastructure, including transportation, water/sanitation, energy, and civic projects, requires increasing local government attention. In the face of so many decisions, traditional engagement opportunities like public hearings **cannot meaningfully capture citizen input**. They have been criticized for being inaccessible to the public (held at times and locations that conflict with work and family responsibilities), too late in the process, and attended by only extreme opposers or supporters. As a result, these engagement opportunities can **create more distrust** with impacted citizens and reinforce existing biases or preferences. Given local government budget and capacity constraints, the lack of engagement can lead to **inefficient resource allocation and citizen opposition to projects**.

Since the 1990s, **local governments have increasingly used information and computer technologies (ICT) to improve public service delivery**. As part of the suite of tools, local governments are also using eParticipation, ICT to support democratic decision making, in an effort to **improve democratic decision-making**. Instead of only hosting public meetings, local governments have the opportunity to increase their reach and improve engagement opportunities with eParticipation, made possible by increasing **investment in civic technology**. This presents an opportunity to improve citizen engagement for local infrastructure delivery.

The civic technology space is fragmented and addresses **eParticipation to varying degrees**. At a very basic level, civic technology can **facilitate voting processes or capture citizen feedback via online comment banks**, increasing **local government efficiency, transparency, and accountability**. On the other end of the spectrum, civic technology can provide meaningful engagement opportunities, **improving equity among citizens**. Despite recent studies of civic technology, city officials have had trouble translating academic **research into action** and **establishing recurring participation among citizens**.

We expand on the eParticipation research by providing a deep dive look at one slice of the civic technology sector: civic technology for local infrastructure delivery (planning, design, construction, and operations/maintenance). To do this, we first categorize and map relevant civic technologies and then provide a detailed overview of three civic technologies.

How can Cities use Civic Technology?

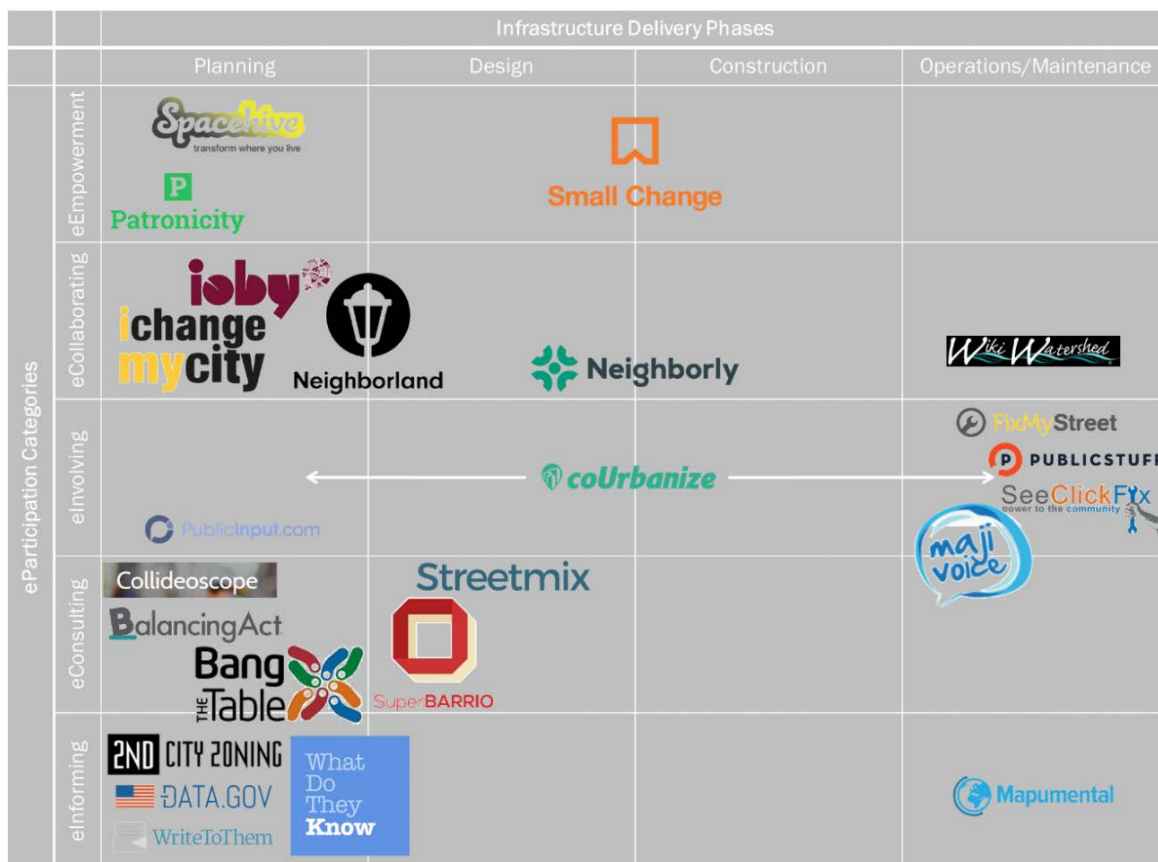
By mapping the landscape of civic technology, we can see more clearly how eParticipation is being used to address public service challenges, including infrastructure delivery. Although many scholars and practitioners have created independent categories for eParticipation, these categorization frameworks follow a similar pattern. At one end of the spectrum, eParticipation efforts provide public service information and relevant updates to citizens or allowing citizens to contact their officials in a **unidirectional flow of information**. At the other end, eParticipation efforts allow for deliberate democracy where citizens share decision-making with local government officials. Of the dozen categorization frameworks we found, we selected the most comprehensive one accepted by practitioners. **This framework** draws from public participation practices and identifies five categories:

- **eInforming:** One-way communication providing online information to citizens (in the form of a website) or to government (via ePetitions)
- **eConsulting:** Limited two-way communication where citizens can voice their opinions and provide feedback
- **eInvolving:** Two-way communication where citizens go through an online process to capture public concerns
- **eCollaborating:** Enhanced two-way communication that allows citizens to develop alternative solutions and identify the preferred solution, but decision making remains the government's responsibility
- **eEmpowerment:** Advanced two-way communication that allows citizens to influence and make decisions as co-producers of policies

In applying the categorization framework to civic technology for infrastructure delivery, we also wanted to consider the specific needs of citizens and functions of infrastructure delivery. Infrastructure delivery includes a series of phases: planning, design, construction, and operations/maintenance. At each phase, different stakeholders are included in decision making. In early phases, citizens can play a larger role in decision making through engagement opportunities. As project details become more concrete, there are **fewer opportunities for citizen engagement**. For example, decisions made during the design phase must be locked in as the project moves into construction, ensuring the project progresses in a timely manner.

After surveying the civic technology space, we found 24 tools that use eParticipation for infrastructure delivery. We map these technologies according to their intended use phase in

infrastructure delivery and type of eParticipation. The horizontal axis divides the space into the different infrastructure delivery phases and the vertical axis shows the five eParticipation categories. Together, we can see how civic technology is attempting to include citizens throughout infrastructure delivery. The majority of the civic technologies available operate as eInforming and eConsulting tools, allowing citizens to provide information to local governments about infrastructure issues. This information is then channeled into the project selection and prioritization process that occurs during the planning phase. A few technologies span multiple infrastructure phases because of their abilities to aggregate many eParticipation technologies to address the functions of each infrastructure phase. Based on this cursory map, we see that there are spaces in the infrastructure delivery process where there are only a few civic technologies. This is often because there are fewer opportunities to influence decision making during the later phases.



To understand the benefits and implications of using eParticipation in infrastructure delivery, we take a deep dive look at three civic technologies. Neighborland embraces eCollaboration capabilities to offer local governments a customizable portal to communicate project details and initiatives with citizens during project's early phases. Ioby allows local nongovernmental leaders to create projects and get them crowdfunded by employing eCollaboration strategies with citizens during the planning and design phases. SeeClickFix is an eInvolving platform that allows citizens to send infrastructure maintenance requests to local government. We selected these civic technologies because they offer different functions and have been used in a variety of settings. To

understand how these civic technologies are impacting specific communities we spoke with the CEOs and reviewed their technology offerings.

Neighborland

Neighborland's communication platform allows local governments to "collaborate with their stakeholders in an accessible, participatory, and equitable way." Local governments craft project pages that include interactive mapping tools, comment capabilities on designs, surveys, donations to projects, and built-in participation metrics. These capabilities have allowed partners to reach 10 to 100 times the number of citizens and the tool has already reached 3 million residents in the United States and Canada. In 2017, Neighborland's CEO Dan Parham explained, "we allow organizations to listen at scale, it does empower people to say what they want." Neighborland's platform helped 67,000 citizens in **Mesa, Arizona** propose, build on, and vote on ideas for the city's strategic planning and budgeting process. In the same year, the San Francisco Planning Department developed the **Central Waterfront/Dogpatch Public Realm Plan**. By engaging with residents in highly participatory workshops and online with Neighborland, residents were able to support and critique projects for investment in their neighborhood's public spaces. Early outcomes include streetscape improvements, the Dogpatch Arts Plaza, Tunnel Top Park, and the renovation of Esprit Park. Neighborland's community-centered approach helps local governments and residents collaborate and make decisions in a new way, leading to more effective urban planning and better outcomes for the communities they serve.

ioby

ioby — "In Our BackYard" — is a civic crowdfunding platform that allows citizens to submit and fundraise for local projects. ioby's founder, Erin Barnes, is dedicated to building community through these projects to counteract distrust between neighbors. "We want to leverage those that are interested so that people are engaged and have a positive feedback loop and do something to make change, meet face to face, that process is the meaningful part of that," Barnes said. Unlike other civic technologies, ioby is focused on building local leadership and capacity outside of the local government. Therefore, the projects proposed on the platform are led by individuals and nongovernmental organizations. For example, the **Hampline Protected Bike Lane project** was proposed by the Broad Avenue Arts District, Livable Memphis (now BLDG Memphis), and the Binghampton Development Corporation. Together, these three organizations worked to raise more than \$70,000 from over 450 individuals to design a protected bike lane in Memphis, Tennessee. ioby staff members worked with the project sponsors to develop online and offline engagement opportunities to build support for the project. Since this project's success, ioby has built a stronger presence in Memphis and encouraged other local leaders to develop and crowdfund civic projects. Similarly, ioby has developed a presence in Cleveland, Detroit, and Pittsburgh. As a result, ioby's power comes from supporting local leaders and building direct engagement with citizens. Recognizing this, local governments, including the **City of Los Angeles**, **have partnered with ioby to provide matching funds for projects**. Through these types of initiatives and one-off projects, ioby has facilitated 1,677 projects and raised over \$5 million.

SeeClickFix

SeeClickFix is a web-based app and platform that enables citizens to directly participate in maintaining city infrastructure. Over the past 10 years, citizens have reported over 4.2 million issues, ranging from potholes to graffiti to illegal trash dumping, in nearly 200 cities in the United States. In 2012, Ann Arbor, Michigan officials sought out a tool to incorporate citizen feedback into maintenance processes and customer service. They found that a tool like SeeClickFix could reduce service costs from \$4 to \$2 per issue. SeeClickFix was able to expand the capabilities of the city's Cityworks technology and in doing so improved city asset management. SeeClickFix's CEO, Ben Berkowitz explained how similar cases exist in many cities: "SeeClickFix is one part a management solution and one part an engagement solution, but what we're finding is most of the cities we talk to are looking for a better version of both." SeeClickFix addresses perhaps the most frequently overlooked phase of infrastructure: operations/maintenance. For most citizens, participating directly in the project planning, design, and funding might be confusing or intimidating. However, there is a unified frustration in accidentally stepping into a pothole while crossing a major street. In this way, SeeClickFix might be the most approachable option as well as offer the most immediate, observable results.

Is it all Good?

Civic technology is offering more engagement opportunities during infrastructure delivery. But, implementing civic technology for infrastructure requires deep considerations by local governments. Similar to past issues with public engagement, civic technology is still vulnerable to issues of representation. Lack of internet access and literacy can impact who is able to use these new tools. Also, the availability of these technologies might continue to highlight viewpoints from extreme support and resistance to the project in question. With more transparency and citizen involvement comes more accountability between citizens and local government. If eParticipation is used for specific projects without follow-through, there is a potential for challenges and frustration from expectant citizens. Not only is it important to acknowledge this increased level of accountability, but the technical capacity needed for deploying civic technology. Many civic technology platforms boast customizable and easy-to-use interfaces. But, once the technology is transitioned to the local government, there must be adequate training and process reform to ensure the technology is adapted successfully.

The field of civic technology is relatively new. There are limited strategies to measure effectiveness of these tools. Scholars and practitioners are eager to communicate benefits, including improved efficiency and transparency. But, platforms and cities are having difficulty measuring the impacts of civic technology on infrastructure delivery. Even though civic technology platforms write case studies and provide anecdotal information to market their tools, this information does not communicate the challenges and failures that local governments face when implementing these

new technologies. At the same time, the nascency of such tools means local governments are still trying to understand how to leverage and protect the enormous amount of data that civic technology tools acquire.

Despite these challenges, civic technology can streamline project delivery and better communicate citizens' preferences for projects. And, looking forward, we see opportunities to integrate multiple civic technologies and provide full service for infrastructure delivery, from planning through operations/maintenance. With future research, we hope to discover new possibilities for using civic technology to improve local governments' capacity for engagement and infrastructure delivery.

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Note: This research is supported by Stanford's Center for Integrated Facility Engineering and is based on previous work by Tyler Pullen. The positioning of the civic technologies was calculated using the scoring mechanism provided [here](#).



Public Engagement: The Future In 2 Data Points

July 3, 2018

by Travis Parker

Travis Parker is the Planning Director for the [City of Lakewood, Colorado](#). Today he's sharing a guest article about the impact of a new website that is helping his community reach more people for public comment on important local issues.

Remember when we knew what people were doing on their phones? (Calling someone.) Remember when you could place a safe bet on who was adopting the latest tech? (Younger folks.) Well, those days are over.

Using new technology for public engagement does not result in narrow representation, instead the opposite is true. The below two data points reveal this along with a glimpse into the future.

First, some background. In August of 2017, the Planning Commission at the City of Lakewood, Colorado, launched a [project that digitizes public hearings](#), the workhorse of public engagement. Since then, the Planning Commission holds their public hearings online as well as in-person, allowing citizens to watch presentations, ask questions, and comment on cases via a website for two weeks prior to the public hearing in chambers.

The approach by the City of Lakewood is markedly different than similar efforts by other cities. For example, the City of Boulder, Colorado, [tested a new idea for remote participation](#): a caller was patched into chambers to provide their public comments via the in-house audio system during the public hearing. (Listen to the call from 6:46pm via a video recording of the meeting [here](#)). The City of Lafayette, also in Colorado, [will begin testing](#) allowing its City Council members to attend public hearings remotely.

These laudable attempts to increase participation from a wider audience and reduce the strain on City Councils are focused on synchronous remote participation. The City of Lakewood is focused on removing both the place *and* time constraints.

Outside of government, in our personal and professional lives, asynchronous remote participation is the name of the game. If it works well in those realms, how can it improve our ability to interact with local government? How can it enable better representation of the people?

To get to the answer, we looked at three recent cases in March and April for the Lakewood Planning Commission and two data points: age of participants and time of day of participation.

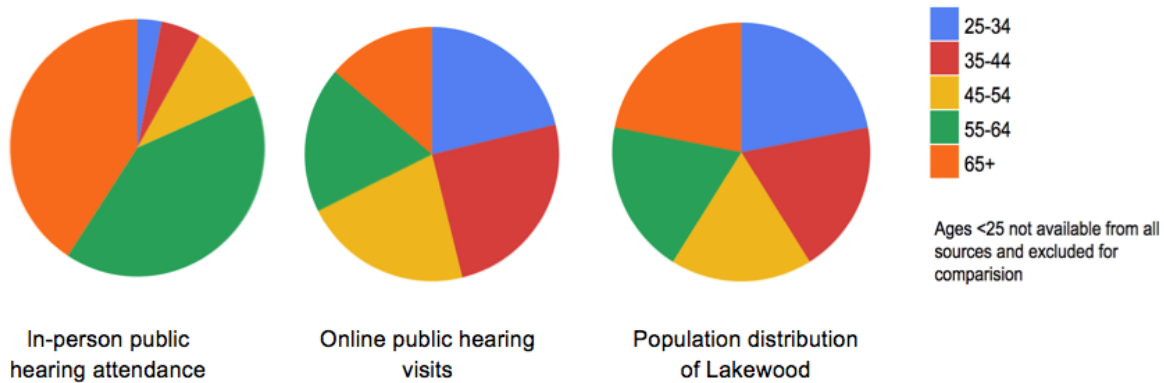
1. Age

For in-person Planning Commission public hearings in Lakewood, attendees skew older based on our unofficial staff counts, and we estimate around 80% of attendees are residents 55 and older. On our online

platform however, residents 55 and older make up only 30% of participants, which almost exactly matches the actual population distribution in Lakewood for that age group.

Rather than creating a bias toward younger residents, online hearings are helping to remove the existing bias of in-person hearings toward older citizens.

Here's the participation in-person versus online compared to population of Lakewood by age range:

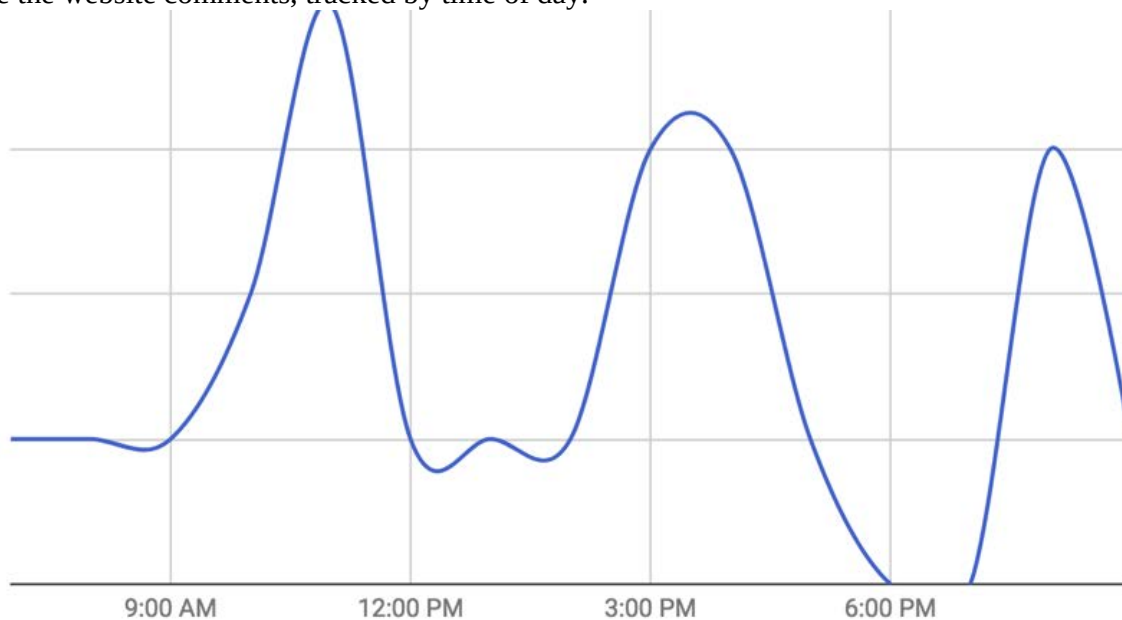


The bottom line? **In-person participation is not representative. Online participation is.**

2. Time of Day

The City of Lakewood's Planning Commission meetings begin at 7 p.m. on Monday nights and last for hours. Any participation in-person would necessarily fall in the evening. Online, the range of participation is distributed throughout the day and, in fact, when given a choice of when to participate, early evening is the last choice of Lakewood residents. In our samples, there was not a single comment submitted between 6:00 and 8:00 p.m; these public hearings are scheduled for the absolute *last* time of day that people want to participate.

Here are the website comments, tracked by time of day:



The evidence is clear: **Removing the constraint of time makes participation more representative.**

The Main Takeaway

Participation in Lakewood Planning Commission public hearings is more than five times higher online than in person (based on views of the presentations). The additional participants online take advantage of the ability to choose the day and time that works for them, commenting throughout the day and over the course of two weeks.

The additional participants are demographically representative of the community as a whole in a way that is nearly impossible for in-person meetings. Focusing on using technology to increase representation appears to have significant promise when it is used to enable asynchronous and remote participation.

The hard lesson for all communities appears to be that we are not doing a good job of allowing public participation in our decision making process. Weekly in-person hearings have extremely limited engagement potential. Communities that are serious about improving transparency and citizen engagement need to embrace technology. The same technological tools that we use in our business and personal lives can be used to ensure representative participation in government decision making.

Fortunately, the answers are not difficult or complicated. Lakewood's solution has proven that technology can work within the existing hearing framework and without requiring additional staff. As early adopters of online hearings continue to add more options for participation, there will be an ever more obvious divide between those governments that prioritize citizen input and those that do not.

Learn more about [City of Lakewood Planning Commission public hearings](#).

Two Cities Test Tinder-Like App to Encourage Citizen Engagement

West Sacramento, Calif., and Santa Monica are testing a Tinder-like app that "meets citizens where they are."

BY CAROLINE COURNOYER / MARCH 13, 2017



West Sacramento Mayor Chris Cabaldon presents "Swiping Left on Citizen Engagement" at the 2017 South by Southwest conference. TWITTER/@DEDMO

AUSTIN, TEXAS — How do you engage citizens when most of them don't have time or interest in attending local government meetings?

"When we make decisions in those kind of meetings based on who shows up ... we end up getting the wrong outcomes; we pick the wrong thing; we chose often the most inequitable things; we sometimes pick based on our most animal instincts," said West Sacramento, Calif., Mayor Christopher Cabaldon.

That's why his city, along with Santa Monica, is testing a Tinder-like app that "meets citizens where they are." Like the dating app Tinder, it lets users swipe left or right to express their approval -- or dislike -- of something. But instead of potential dates, users would be rating possible city projects.

This story was originally published by [Governing](#).

How Roanoke Rocks Civic Engagement

The city proves that a “one-man show” mixed with a little creativity and innovation is sometimes all it takes to connect with the public.

MAY 8, 2017 AT 11:00 AM



By engaging residents and visitors through social media, the city of Roanoke -- with a population of 90,000 -- has been able to attract 180,000 Facebook followers. *Roanoke Facebook Page*



By Ron Littlefield | Senior Fellow

Ron Littlefield, a former mayor of Chattanooga, Tenn., is a senior fellow with the Governing Institute and its lead analyst on the City Accelerator initiative. A city planner by career, he also consults to government through Littlefield Associates.

When a city of 90,000 has 180,000 followers on Facebook, it's doing something right. Roanoke, Va., is that city.

One of the hazards of a long life and career is the necessity to keep up with the times: learning new things, obtaining new skills, exploring new horizons and so on. As a city planner for more than 40 years, I've seen some things. Early on, letters were typed individually and mistakes required something called "white out." We made multiple copies of our reports using mimeograph machines and arrived at meetings with stinking stacks of slightly damp paper and purple fingers. Then along came fax machines and computers and cell phones – ushering in a brave new world of digital technology.

Every transition tested our willingness and ability to change. I have a friend who bought a fax machine and was so timid about adopting new technology that he never took it out of the box. Fortunately, he no longer needs to -- but perhaps I've made my point.

Cities are like people. When times change, they must change as well or risk being left behind.

The mayor of Seattle recently spurred some political buzz when he announced it was time to change how cities engage with their citizens. For decades, Seattle has been the undisputed model for neighborhood organization and citizen engagement. The city's formal system involved citizen councils with memberships, neighborhoods with defined boundaries and regular public meetings.

Back in the '80s, I was part of a delegation that traveled to Seattle to steal its good ideas. When I saw the city's impressive neighborhood engagement system, I came home with a copy of the playbook and proceeded to implement it faithfully and almost verbatim in my own city, Chattanooga.

Following a dustup in Seattle last fall, I wrote a [piece](#) for City Accelerator on the topic. My take on the mayor's dilemma is that Seattle has seen the future and has already started down that difficult and politically dangerous path toward embracing progress. Times have changed.

From where I sit, Roanoke, Va., also appears to have moved on from the tired, old way of engaging citizens. The city is utilizing social media tools in new and innovative ways. In that mid-sized Appalachian mountain community, a special office has been created with a modern purpose that is succinctly stated on the city's [website](#):

The Office of Citizen Engagement brings government and citizens together to foster collaborative conversations, build positive relationships and create new, innovative ways to get citizens involved. Through the use of social media, other digital platforms, neighborhood collaboration, customer service, public outreach, and other special projects, this office provides a one-stop-shop for engaging with the public.

The impressive accomplishments of this new undertaking are outlined in the office's [2016 Social Media Annual Report](#). Here are just a few of the highlights:

- The city's website links with 53 social media pages and has an estimated total reach of 25 million.
- The city's main Facebook page generated 16,000 new page "likes" in 2016 with 1.5 million video views and 2.9 million "likes, comments and shares" in the same period.
- The city makes heavy use of photos and videos with appropriate recognition for contributions sent in by the public.
- During a snow storm in early 2016, the office posted regular updates and snow photos from citizens. In that time, the city's weekly social media reach "topped one million for the first time," according to the report. Note: While it's often tempting to pass over links like these, I highly recommend this brief, well-documented and colorfully illustrated report.

Let me emphasize once again that Roanoke is a city of 90,000.

The Office of Citizen Engagement is admittedly a small office (it's in fact a one-person operation within the Office of the City Manager), but its size does not limit its effectiveness or impact. Timothy Martin, a former reporter and news anchor in broadcast media, is the city's citizen engagement officer. He is a graduate of Radford University with a degree in journalism and focus in media studies.

Martin often speaks of the difference in communicating "to" the public and communicating "with" the local population. He has a "radio voice" and the calm, friendly demeanor of a seasoned public personality. When talking with him in his office, he described how they have used Facebook Live to broadcast city council meetings. Twitter is used to report and deal with

minor emergencies such as potholes. Other social media applications have other uses -- and they apply them all. They are attempting to tap into the whole social media spectrum.

In times of greater emergencies, the Office of Citizen Engagement has been known to set up at the scene and broadcast live on Facebook or other social media channels. Having a city employee (Martin) with the essential credentials needed and skills and ability to get on the inside and keep the public (and other media outlets) informed is a clear advantage. "We had a fire in one of those underground utility vaults that knocked out power in a good part of downtown," Martin said. "Using social media, we were able to keep everyone reassured about the situation just as it was happening."

The office also believes in a good sense of humor. The 2016 report includes information on the city's April Fool's Day activities -- especially outlining its bid for the Olympics, including illustrations of how proposed new sports facilities would fit into downtown Roanoke. Martin said the city also has proposed such things as shifting to autonomous vehicles in the city fleet and using drones to pick up garbage. Humor makes the social media numbers jump, he added.

Martin stressed that there is a larger, overarching framework. Roanoke's Office of Citizen Engagement bases its work on three guiding principles:

1. Promote the city
2. Engage the user
3. Inform the citizens

Roanoke is making rapid advancements and exploring exciting new territory along today's still largely uncharted digital frontier. If the city hasn't yet laid hands on the Holy Grail of civic engagement, at least it seems it may have found the Rosetta Stone -- interpreting the new language and protocols of mass communication and employing public interaction in useful ways applicable to all cities. These are ideas worth stealing.

At the risk of dredging up and paraphrasing one of today's most overused lines, let me say as a long-time observer of local politics that it seems the charming city of Roanoke, Va. -- through its Office of Citizen Engagement -- is "making democracy great again."



[Ron Littlefield](#) | Senior

Fellow | ron.littlefield@gmail.com | <http://twitter.com/ronmayor>

Be part of the campaign for civic innovation at the [City Accelerator](#), presented by Citi Foundation.



Getting Compton's young men to trade gang life for working life

by Compton Mayor Aja Brown

June 14, 2016: 6:48 AM ET

Compton's changed, just ask the mayor

For nearly three decades, Compton was infamous for gang violence and crime. This was fueled by the drug war of the late 1980s, the 1992 South Los Angeles civil unrest, and the devastating effects that the introduction of crack cocaine had in our community. We suffered from system failures and a loss of public trust, which only heightened the despair.

To make matters worse, the media willfully carried the story of Compton's demise to the masses, and the cultural dominance of gangster rap proliferated a soundtrack that etched our community's pain into the mental reference points of America. Compton's story is not unique, but it's arguably the most well-known.

In 2013, I came into office with a \$43 million deficit, a spiked murder rate, failed infrastructure, dilapidated parks, an unemployment rate double the state and triple the national average, zero budget for youth programs, a school district with a 57% graduation rate and a small staff, and yet I had a community that still dared to believe in change.

My administration immediately launched a task force to bring all law enforcement, education and community organizations together to address Compton's most difficult issues: violent crime and human trafficking. We created two subcommittees to focus on gang intervention & prevention, and human trafficking education and diversion.

It was almost intuitive to focus on the population that was failing the most, our young boys and men of color. They had the lowest graduation rates and the highest mortality rates.

After President Obama launched My Brother's Keeper and issued the call to lift the lowest in order to lift our nation, we got behind him 100% and got to work.

To intervene before our youth could be tempted to join a gang, we launched middle school mentoring programs and we created summer enrichment programs to expose our children to education institutions and industry. We assembled our non-profits together and created opportunities to collaborate and share resources.

After beginning with our gang prevention efforts, we began focusing on gang intervention. I had worked in cities for a decade, and I knew that regardless of how many officers you have on the streets, they can't prevent people from shooting guns and taking lives. We needed intervention. So I approached people in my community that I knew had influence and could assist me with bringing gang members to the table. I asked them to let the men know that I would like to speak with them about our babies and our future.

On a Sunday afternoon in June 2014, we had our first meeting. I was amazed and humbled as more than 75 men and women poured into our community center. I introduced myself to every single one of them and thanked them for coming.

The atmosphere was still. We all felt the tension and the power that sat in the room. I asked the men to pull up a chair in a circle, because we are all equal and we're all connected. Many of the men were shocked, yet touched. They couldn't believe that I actually wanted to speak with them and that I treated them with such respect.

I was open and honest, and told them I was tired of seeing them kill one another. I asked them what I could do to help them stop the violence and if we could work toward peace for the benefit of our children. Their ask was simple: They needed jobs, opportunity, access and understanding. And in return, they would work with their individual neighborhoods to bring peace and create a community where our youth could thrive.

From that meeting, Compton Empowered was created -- a community-based gang reduction and intervention initiative focused on empowering ex-gang members to take back their neighborhoods through peace treaties, unity activities and employment opportunities. We committed to work together on a cease-fire and started meeting every other Sunday.

The biggest issue identified by gang members was their need for jobs and the barriers that they faced to employment with criminal records. I felt their desperation. Even if they've been out of prison for 20 years and never broken a law since then, our criminal "justice" system still considers them a felon and thus they and their families are put at a severe disadvantage for truly reintegrating into society.

In the months to follow, the men and women of Compton Empowered met bi-weekly in a neutral location to discuss pressing issues, potential conflicts and deflect rumors between gang members that may incite violence, all of which resulted in a decrease in homicides of nearly 50% during the first six months. While, not every gang is at the table, the majority are, and they are risking their lives every day to create a safer Compton.

As a result of the success of Compton Empowered and President Obama's My Brother's Keeper initiatives, the Compton city council adopted an official City Gang Intervention & Prevention Program that currently employs 13 ex-gang members. These men and women work within their respective neighborhoods and with City staff to keep parks free of gang violence and to help create an environment where families and children feel safe to play and thrive.

Gang Intervention members respond to neighborhood issues, meet one-on-one to deter destructive rumors and recruit youth who have been pre-exposed to gang violence to participate in activities, such as; overnight field trips, sports activities, workshops and career development seminars -- all aimed at building leadership and life skills.

Under our My Brother's Keeper program, we held several free clinics to clean up errors on criminal records, and hosted job fairs through partnerships with legal aid foundations, private law practices and with the support of SEIU 721 labor union, which have provided over 300 people a second chance at employment.

We have put in place a 35% local hiring provision that has helped place over 20 former gang members in jobs. We also hired 13 gang interventionists that work with Compton Parks and Recreation and Compton Unified School District on joint community policing and outreach.

As a result, we achieved record low homicides - 13 in 2015, a reduction of 64% without spending any additional funding for law enforcement. For context, at the height of NWA's Straight Outta Compton, in the '90's, we had approximately 125 homicides per year.

All of our efforts were funded by in-kind donations from both corporate and community sponsors. We didn't know where the money was going to come from, but we moved forward and our needs were continually met.

If we had additional resources, would I want additional officers on the streets? Absolutely. However we didn't have that option in Compton. We used what we had.

President Obama's focus on building awareness around the issues that young men and boys of color face in America through My Brother's Keeper has been integral in driving awareness around the forces that fuel gang violence and has assisted the City of Compton in garnering support behind our program.

Without our President raising this difficult yet necessary conversation, our sponsors would not have been informed and I don't believe they would be as invested in addressing the urgent needs of those with the least, which ultimately benefit all of our residents.

Aja Brown is the mayor of Compton. The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of the author.

CNNMoney (New York)First published June 14, 2016: 6:48 AM ET

Will the People Have a Say in 2018 Budget?



At the participatory budgeting People's Assembly on April 10, Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba engaged as a citizen, rather than as the mayor. Photo by [Stephen Wilson](#).

By [Ko Bragg](#), [Wednesday, April 18, 2018 10:29 a.m. CDT](#)

JACKSON — With the tax deadline not too far in the rearview mirror, finances are still at the foreground of many people's minds, including Jackson officials as they work on the budget for the next fiscal year.

In keeping with the tone of Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba's people-focused campaign pledges, his staff is planning to handle the City's debt without tax increases. At the same time, the mayor's close associates are teaching citizens how to express what they want officials to make room for in the budget through the process of participatory budgeting—the topic of the first [people's assembly](#) of the year on April 10.

Managing Debt, Saving Money

At the City's inaugural weekly press briefing on April 10, Director of Finance and Administration [Charles Hatcher](#) shared his plan for managing Jackson's debt obligations over the next few years. Hatcher said the general obligation debts, or money required to cover interest and repay money borrowed in previous administrations, is around \$9.8 million. In the next fiscal year, that debt is expected to increase by \$5.5 million to \$15.3 million based on bonds issued to the City between 2003 and 2016.

Hatcher does not believe the City could sustain this kind of increase by using property and sales taxes to repay bonds primarily. Instead, he hopes to rearrange the debt payments to even them out over time, which could save Jackson as much as \$4.5 million right now.

"We're not talking about increasing our debt load; we're talking about rearranging it so that we have level payments over time," Hatcher said last week.

That \$4.5 million in savings would come from settling for a \$1-million increase in debt obligations, instead of a potential \$5.5-million increase should the Lumumba administration do nothing to level payments, Hatcher said.

The City will still owe money until the year 2036, but Hatcher said this will make payments more predictable, instead of "lumpy," he said, pointing to a peaking and plummeting graph mapping the city's debt obligations for the next two decades.

Mayor Lumumba praised Hatcher's department for coming up with a "compassionate" strategy for a more consistent pay schedule, especially after last budget cycle when the City Council [approved a 2-millage tax increase](#) that led \$20 more a year homes with a market value of \$100,000. Lumumba said this meant they would not have to resort to closing early-childhood development centers or [furlough city employees](#) as the City has done in the past.

"What this budget reflects is an opportunity where we don't have to make as severe choices over what we provide to the community," Lumumba said.

The mayor added that this restructure would also help align the way the City spends money with the way the City receives funds.

"While our payments and our debt is spiking, the money that the City receives is not at this time," Lumumba said.

"This provides relief to the citizens that we won't be asking them to ... make up the difference (by) raising taxes again. We're tasked with meeting the needs and desires of the citizens, and money is a critical component of that."

A People's Budget?

Some Jacksonians hope that compassion stretches to fund a City project that the people decide on through a process called participatory budgeting. Boiled down, participatory budgeting would allow Jacksonians to directly decide how public money is spent.

At the M.W. Stringer Grand Lodge in west Jackson, a Masonic temple that hosted civil-rights planning sessions for decades, at least 100 people filled the auditorium for the first people's assembly of the year on April 10.

People's assemblies invite the community to share what they want to see change or take place around them, and Lumumba had campaigned on the promise to implement them in his administration.

While the mayor supports this process, the people's assembly [works independently of the mayor's office](#), with his sister, Rukia Lumumba, and Akil Bakari chairing the group.

Attendees received a letter or a number that led them to break off into small groups. The mayor, Ward 2 Councilman Melvin Priester Jr., City Council President Charles Tillman of Ward 5 and several officers from the Jackson Police Department participated in the group sessions as "civilians," so to speak.

Jumbo-sized Post-it notes were tacked onto the walls of the auditorium with questions about economic justice and participating in local government written on them. The groups rotated through all of the sheets, responding to the question at hand in what was called a "gallery walk."

Attendees considered some of the biggest economic issues facing Jackson to be the Environmental Protection Agency's [consent decree with the City over wastewater](#), infrastructure, potholes, wage gaps, blight, crime, violence and misappropriation of funds. Many of those common threads appeared on other Post-its asking about economic injustice in people's neighborhoods and families.

Robert Blaine, [the City's chief administrative officer](#), gave a presentation on the budget in Hatcher's absence about the importance of increasing revenue.

"One of the things that I often hear people say is, 'Well, the City of Jackson has a whole lot of money, you all have hundreds of millions of dollars.' But ... the discretionary part of the budget is actually quite small," Blaine said.

He encouraged the room to spend money in the City to increase the amount of sales tax coming in. In Jackson, the low tax revenue coming into the City is a systemic problem related to brain drain and flight of the tax base, as well as Jacksonians spending money outside the city limits. Blaine said that in studying other majority-minority cities similarly sized to Jackson in the South, this city is the outlier on the bottom with per-capita income.

But Jackson is also at the top of cities with high-income, high-wage, high-technology jobs with four major hospitals and seven institutions of higher learning.

"Jackson, Mississippi, has no problem creating wealth. We have a serious problem in retaining wealth," Blaine said.

Money Necessary

Valerie Warren of Our City Our Voice, a nonprofit organization that does participatory budgeting workshops, walked people through the framework of participatory budgeting, a multi-step process that began with last week's introductory meeting. Then comes an idea-collection phase, as well as a proposal-development process, which Warren said takes the longest. Next is voting and the building phase that brings a project to life such as a playground, a community center or whatever the people decide they want. Warren told the Jackson Free Press it is critical for the City to commit funds at the beginning.

"What that does is it makes it concrete—we all know that nothing is going to happen without money," Warren told the Jackson Free Press.

She added that knowing the amount of money allocated makes it better for outreach and getting citizens involved because you can ask them, "What do you want to do with this money?"

Warren emphasized that the participatory budgeting process is not a one-off event, but also that people can get involved at any point in the process. Participatory budgeting began in the 1980s in Brazil and has since branched out to different places around the world. The idea is to get people of all creeds involved with the governing process through direct impact.

Attendees like JJ Townsend, who launched a local community crowd-funding [nonprofit called Citizenville](#), said he and the other people at his table thought they would be voting on a project at the assembly that night.

"Anything that is going to get people engaged and involved with what's going on in the government in the City, I'm for, and I'm going to attend every single event they have for this.

"... But I was thinking that the gallery walk was going to be our ideas, and we vote at the end, and a final four would be chosen, and the City would do something with it," Townsend said. He added that by the end of the evening, he understood the importance of the education piece.

The next people's assembly is planned for June to continue the discussion on participatory budgeting among other things, with more details forthcoming.

Email city reporter Ko Bragg at ko@jacksonfreepress.com and follow her on Twitter at [@keaux_](#) for breaking news.

How Communities Can Thrive in a Post-Newspaper World

As a suburb of Atlanta has shown, the key is creating an army of informed and engaged citizens.

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By Otis White | Contributor

President of Civic Strategies Inc.

I understand why most local-government officials and many other civic leaders don't like reporters. Some journalists can be uninformed, easily distracted by the sensational, or strangely uninterested in the bigger and better stories that are happening around them. But, man, are you going to miss these folks when they are gone.

That's because the void left by the loss of independent, professional reporters will be filled by far less reliable sources of news and other information: rumor, gossip and particularly social media, which so often are dominated by angry or frightened people with little interest in facts. And this will be much, much worse.

This isn't a warning about the future. It's happening now as newspapers reduce coverage or simply close up shop, so that local governments that were once covered daily are left in silence. The situation is so dire in New Jersey that the state legislature recently **put up \$5 million** to encourage somebody, anybody, to start covering these "news deserts."

But assuming no one starts a professional news organization in your community, what can a local government do to connect with its citizens in a post-newspaper world?

I put this question to a former mayor of a city known for its tight bond with citizens. Decatur is a close-in suburb of Atlanta that's beloved by urbanists for its walkable, transit-oriented downtown and pleasant neighborhoods. It has a well-run local government and was recently named an All-America City by the National Civic League.

Call a meeting in Decatur and the citizens will turn out. I know this because I was involved in a planning effort there in 2010 that began with a large-scale citizen engagement effort. Hundreds of people participated in long meetings about what the city could be. Many of their ideas are being realized today.

Not that you would know any of this if you lived elsewhere in the Atlanta area. That's because the daily newspapers stopped covering Decatur's city commission meetings long ago. The only time reporters show up at Decatur City Hall today is when something bad happens, which is blessedly infrequent.

So how has Decatur maintained such a tight bond with its citizens in a post-newspaper era? That's what I wanted to know from Bill Floyd, who was a city commissioner for 22 years and mayor for most of that time.

I started by asking about a colorful monthly newsletter called *Decatur Focus* that the city mails to every household. Was this the way Decatur kept citizens informed, basically by starting its own publication?

Well, Floyd said in his polite way, Decatur Focus was useful for communicating the city's plans. "You have to stay in touch with people," he said. And he was amazed by how many people read the newsletter and commented on it.

But, no, it wasn't the newsletter alone. In fact, Floyd went on, there is no single way cities can communicate in a social media world. Nor would a single communicator be effective, even one at City Hall. Rather, he said, you need an army of communicators in the social media, most of them residents. And Decatur has built just such an army through its endless citizen-engagement efforts.

The bedrocks are *Decatur 101* and the *Citizens Police Academy*. Decatur 101 is what it sounds like, two-hour classes on how the city works, delivered over a seven-week period. Other cities have programs like this; this one is simply done better. Started in 2000, Decatur 101 became so popular that in 2006 the city began running two classes, with morning and evening sessions. There's a waiting list of citizens who want a spot. Later, Decatur 101 inspired the Citizens Police Academy, a 10-week course on the local police and criminal-justice systems. (There's even a Junior Police Academy for 11-to-14-year-olds.)

The result of these and other city programs, Floyd said, is that there are hundreds of citizens who know how to get information from the city. So, if a rumor starts on a neighborhood website about, say, car break-ins, or if someone spreads falsehoods about a rezoning case, a citizen who has been through Decatur 101 or the Police Academy is bound to see it, call a city official and have the facts in short order. "And when somebody says, 'Here's what the city says,' it just stops the rumors cold," Floyd added.

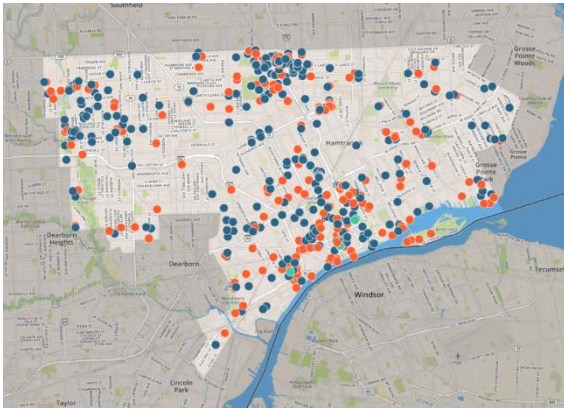
Decatur did not create its citizen-engagement programs in response to social media. There were no social media in 2000. It started them because it believed that informed, involved citizens made it a better place. That the city discovered a way to thrive in a post-newspaper world was a happy, unintended benefit. Wouldn't accomplishing the same thing be good news for your community?



Otis White | Contributor | otwhite@civic-strategies.com | [@otiswhite](https://twitter.com/otiswhite)



Making Sure All of Detroit Has a Voice on Sustainability



BY [EMILY NONKO](#) | DECEMBER 19, 2018

(Credit: coUrbanize/Detroit Office of Sustainability)

To get a sense of how Detroiters think about sustainability in their city, you can start with [this map](#). Location-based comments left by residents point out what they like — native plants sprouted in empty lots, proximity to transit and access to parks — and what they don't, which ranges from lack of bike lanes to vacant properties.

Residents can support comments left by other residents, and occasionally, the City of Detroit chimes in after suggestions. “Great comment, Dave. This will help inform the planning for greater mobility,” the city responds to a suggestion of rehabbing a downtown bus station.

It looks a lot different than the typical community meeting, though this digital map is not necessarily meant to replace it. The map is one of many efforts Detroit's Office of Sustainability has taken to ensure robust community input for its Sustainability Action Agenda, due to come out next spring.

The office is less than two years old and runs on a staff of three, says Office of Sustainability Director Joel Howrani Heeres. Though matters of sustainability were not ignored by residents or city agencies, he says, “they have not been focused on in a unified way.”

The office set two early goals: first, making government operations more efficient by reducing energy costs. Second, utilizing that money to address resident-focused solutions to the city's sustainability needs.

Heeres wants to address the immediate needs of Detroiters before aiming for big-picture sustainability goals set in other cities. Over 130 cities across the U.S. have some kind of sustainability plan; many aim to be carbon neutral in 30 years.

“We have myriad challenges that are different than a lot of other cities that have been the vanguard of sustainability,” Heeres says.

The office decided on a holistic approach engaging residents on everything from housing to green space to energy bills to waste and air quality. It set a goal to engage with at least 7,000 Detroiters, a number surpassed in this year's online and offline process.

This “intensive engagement,” as Heeres call it, included a survey (available on paper and [online](#)), meetings with local organizations and four town halls. Fourteen sustainability ambassadors, two per council district, focused on specific neighborhoods, where they attended community meetings, passed out surveys and spoke with residents.

The digital map — and the invitation to leave feedback on it — is the result of a partnership with [coUrbanize](#), a tech startup founded out of MIT’s School of Architecture and Planning. Co-founder Karin Brandt, previously a city planner, got the idea after realizing many community engagement processes weren’t attracting diverse audiences, but rather only attracted residents more likely opposed to change.

“In terms of community engagement,” Brandt says, “Tech is a really important solution to supplement the existing process, but I don’t think it replaces it.”

Heeres points out Detroit is still a city with a significant “digital divide” — [a 2017 report](#) found that approximately 40 percent of Detroit households remain completely offline. He says that responses to the office’s paper surveys were more representative of city demographics than the responses online.

Still, the team found ways the digital and in-person engagement could complement one another. coUrbanize requires everyone who participates to use their real name, much like you’re asked to sign in at a community meeting. But it doesn’t collect additional data around race or income level.

“The analytics showed we actually had some gaps in key districts where there wasn’t as many responses coming from the online platform,” says Katrina Lewis, a senior consultant with AECOM who helped coordinate engagement with the Office of Sustainability.

The team posted yard signs in those areas with a phone number for residents to text their feedback. Results were mixed, says Lewis. They also increased boots on the ground with more location-specific outreach by sustainability ambassadors.

Late this summer, the team added a new phase of engagement after residents asked for more research material from the office before it finalized an action plan. The Office of Sustainability held focus groups in October and November with Arabic and Spanish-speaking communities, faith-based communities and youth.

Lewis found the digital supplement helped as a way to maintain conversations around sustainability after community meetings. “It was a way to remain present in people’s minds, either by posting updates or leaving general questions open on the site,” she says. “There’s not a cost-effective way to do that otherwise.”

With the community process wrapped up, the Office of Sustainability will spend the next few months sorting through feedback to set its sustainability agenda. It expects to release Detroit’s Sustainability Action Plan in April.

“We haven’t gotten to this point yet,” Lewis says, “But those map comments will help us think through where solutions might make sense to pilot or put in place.”



[Emily Nonko](#) is a Brooklyn, New York-based reporter who writes about real estate, architecture, urbanism and design. Her work has appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Magazine*, *Curbed* and other publications.