



3. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR STREET DESIGN

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(Credit: Urban Health Partnerships, Inc.)



INTRODUCTION

Effective community engagement is critical when developing policies and projects that make a community's built form more livable and more supportive of active transportation. There are many benefits of effective community engagement in projects influencing the built environment, be they urban, suburban, or redevelopment projects. The overall goal is meaningful community participation in the decision-making process.

Effective community engagement improves the success rates of policies and projects affecting the built environment because it helps the agencies and organizations leading a project understand and respond to local conditions. Agencies that create true community engagement are more successful at adapting to socio-economic changes that may influence the effort than those that do not conduct effective outreach (Cogan, E. and Faust, S., *Innovative Civic Engagement Tools and Practices in Land Use Decision-Making*, April 2010). When people affected by a project are involved from the beginning of the planning process, the likelihood of unexpected or significant opposition when it comes time to implement the project is reduced. Community members also have unique knowledge of local contexts, including political, cultural, and geographic settings. By interacting with the public and gaining local insight, project leaders can shape and direct the project in keeping with the community's vision and needs.



Public workshops should engage people in the planning process
(Credit: Urban Health Partnerships, Inc.)

Effective community engagement also has the power to build social capital—the “social networks and interactions that inspire trust and reciprocity among citizens” (Leyden, K., “Social Capital and the Built Environment: The Importance of Walkable Neighborhoods,” *American Journal of Public Health*, 2003, 93[9]:1546–1551). A community with a high level of social capital is characterized by a culture of neighbors knowing each other, interest and participation in local politics, high rates of volunteerism, and diversity in social connections. These characteristics foster a sense of community, engender trust, enhance innovative problem solving, and increase the likelihood that stakeholders will support financial investments in community projects.

Research has demonstrated that a population can achieve long-term health improvements when people become involved in their community and work together to effect change (Hanson, P., “Citizen Involvement in Community Health Promotion: a Role Application of CDC's PATCH Model,” *International Quarterly of Community Health Education*, 1988-89; 9[3]:177-186). Thus, even before projects are fully developed, creating a strong community engagement process



sets the community on a path toward improved health. Effective community outreach also helps address unequal access to health, including issues such as active living. Health equity, or the fair distribution of health determinates, outcomes, and resources regardless of social standing, is affected by factors such as poverty, housing, language, quality of education, and quality of healthcare. Through successful community outreach, people of all ages, backgrounds, and social standing are able to contribute to projects that support health and well-being. They also can help project leaders better understand how social, cultural, and economic barriers that impact historically disadvantaged communities are relevant to improving community health and well-being.

This chapter reviews principles and strategies to engage communities, including developing a plan for reaching out to communities, broadening the list of community stakeholders, fostering cultural competence, and achieving informed consent. It also provides an overview of the methods of community outreach used to garner input on these guidelines.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AT THE BROWARD MPO

The Broward Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) conducts a thorough community engagement process about all aspects of metropolitan transportation planning. The MPO is a government agency responsible for transportation planning and funding allocation in Broward. The MPO works with the public, other governmental agencies, elected officials, and community groups to address transportation needs and develop funded transportation plans.

THE BROWARD MPO IS WORKING WITH YOU

The Broward MPO wants to learn from your experiences, to help make the transportation decision making process the best it can be. The MPO knows that its decisions affect the future of all those who live, work, and play in our region. The MPO is committed to understanding your diverse transportation needs, concerns and ideas about what needs to be changed or be improved. Together we can make Broward County and the Southeast Florida region, a more livable place.

The Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach MPOs have developed an interactive web-based tool called the “Transportation Outreach Planner” available at the following website <http://mpotransportationoutreachplanner.org/> . The tool assists transportation planners and public involvement/information officers in the creation of effective public engagement programs and to accomplish Title VI goals by identifying the demographics of a community, selecting appropriate public outreach strategies based on that information, and learning about the area’s history and any challenges they may face.



PLEASE GET INVOLVED

To learn more about Broward Complete Streets and other Transforming Our Community's Health (TOUCH) Initiatives, please visit www.BrowardCompleteStreets.org.

Visit the MPO's website regularly at www.BrowardMPO.org.

- Invite MPO staff to speak to your organization.
- Sign up to receive quarterly electronic newsletters.
- Complete a survey.
- Learn about the MPO Board and MPO Committees.

Or call and ask to speak to the Public Information Officer at [954-876-0033](tel:954-876-0033).

Plan to attend one of the MPO Board or Committee meetings. All meetings are open to the public and public participation is encouraged. Please visit the [Calendar Section](#) of the MPO website to see dates and times of upcoming meetings.

The Broward MPO Offices are located in the Trade Centre South Building at 100 West Cypress Creek Road, Suite 850, Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33309. For more information regarding directions and how to contact us, please visit the [Contact Us](#) section of the website.

For complaints, questions or concerns about civil rights or nondiscrimination; or for special requests under the Americans with Disabilities Act, please contact: Christopher Ryan, Public Information Officer/Title VI Coordinator at [\(954\) 876-0036](tel:954-876-0036) or ryanc@browardmpo.org.

BROWARD COMPLETE STREETS INITIATIVE PUBLIC WORKSHOPS

The Broward Complete Streets Initiative held three public workshops in different areas of the county to generate public feedback on establishing complete streets community design standards to make our streets safe and healthy for all users. Concerned Broward citizens from all over the county attended to provide input to the process and learn more about how Broward County is joining communities across the country in rethinking road design and balancing rights-of-way for all users. Input received from the Broward Complete Streets Initiative workshops was incorporated throughout the *Broward Complete Streets Guidelines*. In addition, some of the key ideas and concepts heard from public workshop participants appear as notes in the individual chapters.



Map from a Broward Complete Streets Initiative Workshop
(Credit: Urban Health Partnerships, Inc.)



Drop in for
FREE
Refreshments!

BROWARD COMPLETE STREETS INITIATIVE

Safer, Healthier Streets for ALL Users

Get Involved: Participate in a Public Workshop!

Tuesday, April 17, 3-7 pm
Northwest Broward
North Lauderdale City Complex
701 SW 71st Avenue
North Lauderdale, 33068

Thursday, April 19, 1-3 pm
Central Broward
NOVA University: Don Taft University Center
3301 College Avenue
Fort Lauderdale, 33068

Wednesday, April 18, 6-8 pm
Southeast Broward
Carver Ranches Public Library
4735 SW 18 Street
West Park, 33023



Complete Street Image By AAPP

BROWARD COMPLETE STREETS INITIATIVE

Safer, Healthier Streets for ALL Users



Do you like to bike?
Do you like to walk?
Wish you could walk and bike to more places in Broward?
Participate in the Complete Streets Initiative
Tell Us What You Think: Take our survey!
Visit: www.browardcompletestreets.org or scan this QR code.

Need more information? Visit www.browardcompletestreets.org

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ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A conventional model of “public involvement” has been built around complying with legal requirements for issuing public notices about projects and related events, holding public hearings to solicit feedback, and incorporating feedback into draft recommendations. The community has been invited in when project leaders have decided input is needed—or when it is mandated by law—and the public hearings, citizen advisory councils, and public comment sessions have formalized the effort. At many public meetings or events, a classroom structure communicates to people that they are to listen and not converse. This model fails to truly engage the public.

Given the many benefits offered by true community engagement, it is clear that project leaders, policy-making bodies, government agencies, health agencies, and community organizations have a special obligation to develop an inclusive approach to outreach. To engage communities, leaders must move from the conventional model to one that focuses on outreach, capacity-building, inclusiveness, and collaboration. Employing the following principles and strategies will help.

DEVELOP A PLAN

Project leaders shouldn’t begin a public process without first developing a thoughtful and thorough community outreach plan that describes the desired outcomes of the project, and details the public process, including who the stakeholders and audiences are, how they should be reached, the messages to garner interest and tools that will be most effective in reaching them, and how the success of the effort will be measured. The plan should describe how outreach efforts will help build capacity, promote a shared language, illustrate project benefits, and inspire participation.

In general, community engagement activities need to address issues that the public perceives as important. Thus, while developing the community outreach plan, project developers should seek ways to explain to the public why the project matters. Additionally, efforts should be made to conduct workshops, events, or meetings in places that are comfortable and familiar to the audiences, and to use language that is clear. Each communication or event should contribute to the public’s understanding of the project and its purpose.

This chapter does not provide a template for a community outreach plan; it provides general guidance to help project leaders understand important principles and methods of achieving community engagement. With this guidance, a community outreach plan can be developed that utilizes best practices to accommodate local contexts and support community needs in working toward the goal of the project.

A community outreach plan should at the very least describe the project, the goals of the outreach effort (definition of success), identified issues, target audiences, messages that are



meaningful and relevant to the audiences, distribution channels, key messengers or speakers, resources available, tools, timelines, desired outcomes, and methods of evaluation and adjustment.

Specific outreach tools may include educational workshops, open houses, focus groups, citizen advisory committees, deliberative polling, media outreach, paid advertising, surveys, print materials (such as flyers and brochures), PSAs, educational videos, slide presentations, charrettes, newsletters, websites and other online communications, social media, direct mail, letters to the editor or guest commentaries, councils, speakers' bureaus, partnerships, coffeehouse chats, public meetings, multi-lingual comments cards, interviews, demonstrations, bulletin boards, and more.

"Should have more workshops County-wide with more advertisement of the event"

- (Broward Complete Streets Public Workshop at NOVA Southeastern participant)



Public workshops should give participants the opportunity to fill out multi-lingual comment cards because some people fill more comfortable writing their ideas or would like to provide a written record of their ideas.

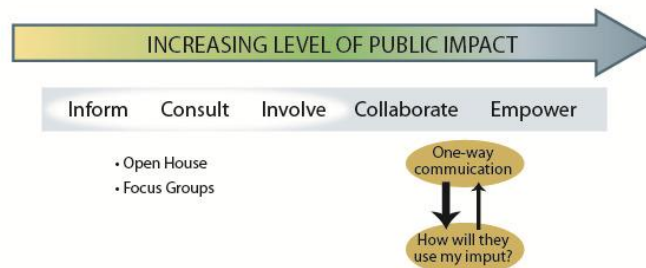
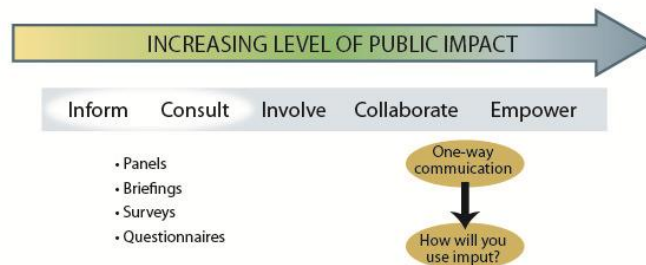
(Credit: Urban Health Partnerships, Inc.)



ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR SUCCESS

Project leaders must take responsibility for developing effective and successful outreach programs that achieve identified goals. Too often, blame for a failed public process or event—one at which the turnout is disappointing, for example—is placed on public apathy. In many cases, though, the outreach effort was inadequate or misdirected. Sometime, the messages simply fail to convey why community members should care to participate in the process. For example, a conventional public notice may announce that the public is invited to a public hearing to comment on a proposed transportation plan. By contrast, a more meaningful outreach message would be that community members' input is needed to shape the community's future; the announcement would speak of streets, sidewalks, trees, and parks, would explain that transportation systems are integral to community-building, and would request residents' help to determine what their community should become.

If truly effective community outreach was conducted and the public still showed little interest in the process, then the value of the project to the public must be revisited. If, on the other hand, project leaders understand the project truly is important and the public simply hasn't engaged, then the effectiveness of the outreach effort must be revisited. Were the messages meaningful to the identified stakeholders? Were events held at convenient and comfortable times and places? Did people perceive the process as interesting, simple, important, or



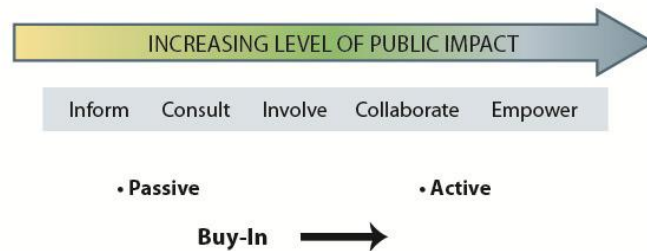
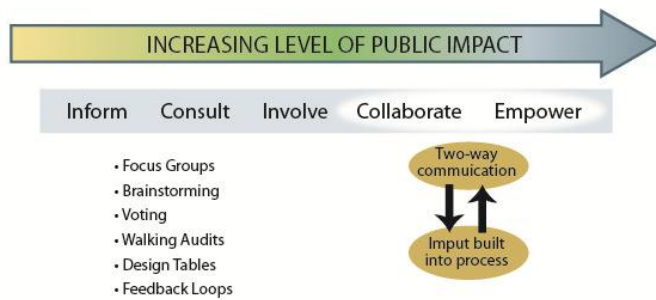


relevant to their lives? Did the messages even reach the target audiences?

A third consideration is that failure and success haven't been properly defined. For example, sheer numbers of participants may not be an appropriate measure of success. In a small community, an event turnout of 15 people who represent diverse interests, are truly interested in the project, and learn something from or contribute to the process may be a much more successful outcome than a roomful of 75 people who leave the event disengaged or who didn't find an opportunity to contribute in a meaningful way. Appropriately defining success and failure of a public process is an important part of developing a community outreach plan.

When defining success and failure, consider whether the community engagement effort should be designed to:

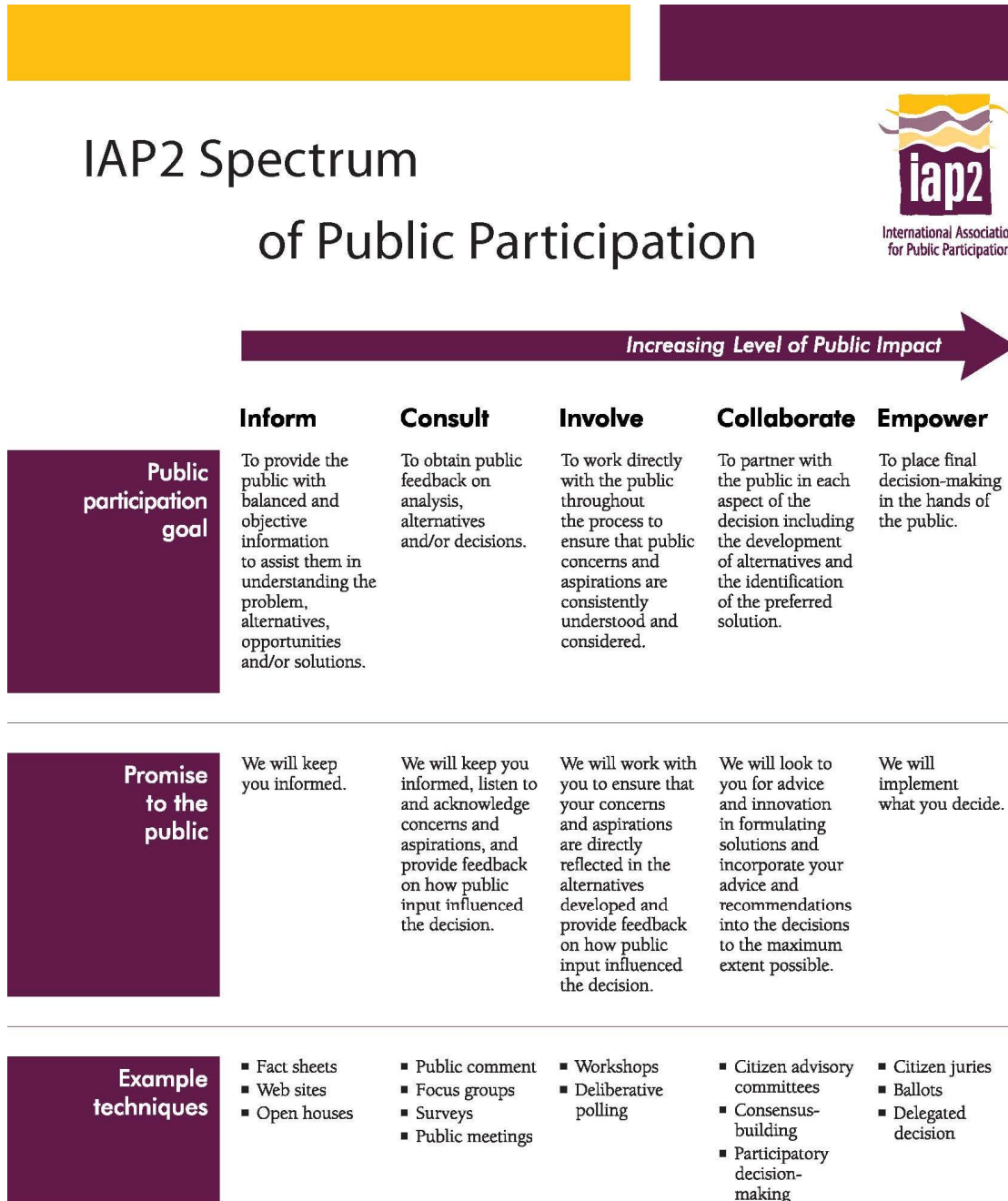
- **Inform:** community members are informed about the project but aren't actively involved in the process.
- **Consult:** the public is asked to provide feedback on analyses, alternatives, and decisions.
- **Involve:** feedback loops allow community members to influence multiple stages or drafts of the project.
- **Collaborate:** the public is a partner in each phase of the decision-making process and provides direct advice on solutions.
- **Empower:** the final decision is in the hands of community members and the project leaders will implement what the community chooses. Care is taken to ensure that the community is educated about approaches that work for all people, that key participants will help spread the word throughout the community, and that community members will play an active role when issues come before policy or decision-making groups such as councils and commissions.



(Credit: Michele Weisbart, adapted from the International Association for Public Participation)



Outreach programs that most actively engage and empower the public also lead to the highest levels of buy-in and build the greatest support, which help alleviate some of the pressure on staff and elected leaders. The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) created the graphic below to summarize the effective spectrum of the public participation process.





START WITH A BASE OF SHARED VALUES AND BUILD UNDERSTANDING

The traditional model for public involvement in projects that affect the built environment often engages the public too late in the process, and in a manner that pits interests against each other.

A better model is to start the public process with visioning sessions or educational workshops that identify or clarify shared values. In some communities, a vision plan already exists and in those cases, the vision plan should help guide the project development. In other communities, a simple values-clarification exercise during an initial public workshop can go a long way toward helping stakeholders see that they generally want the same things for their streets—safety and security, economic development, attractive sidewalks, landscaping, and so on—and that their goal should be to collaborate on ways to achieve those ideals through the project being developed. Values clarification also can provide useful guidance to policy makers when trade-offs are concerned, for example, when the potential long-term effects of a decision are measured against short-term gains or losses. Starting with a base of shared values helps ensure outcomes aren't predetermined, but that the local vision is driving the process.

From this base of shared values, strive to build understanding and knowledge. Think like an educator, use language that is familiar and clear to the audience, and encourage reciprocal learning (learning from each other) and experiential learning (learning by doing or experiencing). Frame issues neutrally to maintain credibility and to ensure participants can make informed decisions. Facilitate well-informed and well-rounded discussions that ensure all voices are heard.



*Visioning sessions allow people to identify ways to guide a project's development.
(Credit: Urban Health Partnerships, Inc.)*



*Public meetings should allow opportunities for people to voice their opinions.
(Credit: Dan Burden)*



Toolbox: Active Workshops and Design Charrettes

The conventional format for public involvement usually doesn't build community interest, can be downright boring, and fails to capitalize on opportunities to build social capital through the process or engage people in reciprocal learning. Even workshop formats that aim to be more educational can fall short in efforts to build a shared understanding of the issues being addressed, or in making the participants feel truly engaged in the process.

Two tools being used by more and more communities throughout the country are active workshops and design charrettes.

Active, or experiential, workshops get participants out into the community to explore firsthand what shortcomings exist and how to improve upon those conditions. Active workshops include educational presentations, but focus on active learning and firsthand experience. Active workshops don't have to be long events. A successful one can be as short as three hours, if planned well.

Charrettes are collaborative sessions to solve design problems. Charrettes usually involve a group of designers working directly with participants to identify issues and create solutions. A charrette can be one day, several days, or weeks. A charrette conducted as part of a public process for a street should include educational activities (such as short presentations and walking audits, sharing of expectations and desired outcomes, priority setting, mapping exercises during which participants break out into small groups and mark-up maps with potential challenges and opportunities) and building consensus or informed consent for a proposed solution or set of solutions. Charrettes create a collaborative planning process that harnesses the talent of residents, townmakers, community leaders, and public health officials alike. At the end of the charrette, project leaders present the outcomes and findings to stakeholder groups and to the public.



*Design charrette engaging stakeholders
(Credit: Dan Burden)*

Getting all the right people together for a design charrette is essential to ensuring that the outcome reflects the values and goals of the community. People from all sectors of society with diverse backgrounds are needed at a charrette, including local government officials, planners and designers, landscape architects, transportation engineers, nonprofit managers, public health officials, and of course, residents.

Even with engaged and motivated participants from all relevant backgrounds, the charrette still may be missing a group that can provide valuable insight about how to design a healthier and

Even with engaged and motivated participants from all relevant backgrounds, the charrette still may be missing a group that can provide valuable insight about how to design a healthier and



happier community: children. Children's charrettes can bring valuable stakeholders in that might not otherwise be able to participate. They also provide the benefit of a unique perspective. The chief objectives in a children's charrette are for it to be fun and engaging. Work with schools, parks and recreation departments, and parent/teacher associations to identify the best venue for engaging children and to conduct the needed outreach to ensure children attend. Also make sure children's charrettes are age appropriate.

Effective active workshops and design charrettes help build social capital in the community. When people are taken outside of a classroom or presentation structure and are put in an environment, such as designing around tables or walking along streets to evaluate the built environment, where they can converse freely and naturally with others, many shared interests and connections emerge. This can foster partnerships that cross real or perceived boundaries, such as differences in generation, culture, socio-economic status, or geography. Effective workshops and charrettes often dedicate time toward the beginning of the events to help participants get to know each other through ice-breaking exercises that ideally will lead to long-lasting relationships.

Planning and conducting successful active workshops and design charrettes requires attention to the following details:

- Engage key partners early. Identify community-based organizations, government agencies, healthcare providers, employers, school boards, the media, and other organizations whose members or stakeholders may have an interest in the topic. Engage transportation, planning, emergency services, public health, and public works entities early in the planning process, and then enlist their help to conduct outreach and to issue invitations.
- Choose the right audit site. Work with the key partners to identify an audit site that captures the essence of changes needed throughout the community, or one that will have the greatest impact or has the potential to become a model project and serve as a catalyst for other projects.
- Consider comfort and abilities. Give careful consideration to participants' comfort and abilities. Everyone who wishes to take part should be able to do so, and any special needs should be accommodated. Also, if the event is held during hot or cold months, conduct outdoor portions during the most comfortable time of day. Accommodate the needs of participants: for example, providing food allows working people to attend a 7 p.m. workshop; parents may need an organized play room for children too young to participate in the workshops.
- Encourage relationship-building and provide a next step. Effective workshops and charrettes will motivate and inspire those who take part, and many will be eager to contribute their energies toward enacting change. They will need to draw upon each other's strengths, stay in contact, offer each other support, and share information to undertake the important work to be done. Encourage them throughout the event to network with each other and exchange contact information. If possible, form a "working group" and decide upon a first meeting date; invite people to opt in.



In particularly successful workshops and charrettes, project leaders can stand back and observe while residents pore over maps, draw meaningful new lines, find ways to improve access to healthy eating and active living, and generally work together toward a shared vision. Project leaders will need to provide technical guidance, but the community can and should make choices about the future together.

BROADEN THE LIST OF STAKEHOLDERS

To build effective community engagement, project leaders should broaden the list of stakeholders and partners whose involvement is sought. The overarching goal should be to achieve diversity by involving a demographically and geographically balanced group of people representing various interests and backgrounds.

Stakeholders and partners commonly include city and county staff, advocacy groups, residents, business operators, property owners, elected officials, community leaders, neighborhood safety groups, emergency responders, school representatives, health agencies, “Main Street” or downtown groups, charitable non-profit organizations, and regional employers. To be more effective, project leaders also should seek the early involvement of faith-based organizations, news outlets, potential opposition groups, and seasonal residents.



*Stakeholders should be active participants
(Credit: Urban Health Partnerships, Inc.)*

In every community, there are people and groups that serve unique roles or have connections built on local context or events. Project leaders should determine who they are and invite them into the process early.



Faith-Based Organizations

Across the country, churches, “build and sustain more social capital—and social capital of more varied forms—that any other type of institution” (*Better Together, The Report of the Saguaro Seminar: Civic Engagement in America*, Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government, 2011). In small towns or areas of sprawl, churches, temples, and mosques often serve a major role in building community and capacity for change. Thus, project leaders should seek innovative ways to work with church leaders to engage their membership in public projects.

Potential Opposition Groups

Special efforts should be made to identify and reach out to people and organizations that may be expected to oppose the project, to build their trust and involvement. Try to identify and address their concerns both as part of the public process and during special stakeholder interviews or meetings. This may include internal groups or professionals who initially may be inclined to provide technical brush-offs. For example, they may at the outset be worried that sanitation trucks won’t be able to maneuver on narrow roads, that trees may disrupt drainage, or that a crosswalk isn’t needed where people don’t already try to cross the road.

Whether internal or external, these concerns should be addressed early in the public process to give the potential opposition time to understand the project, become comfortable with proposed solutions, ask many questions, and decide whether to support the effort. Support is much more likely when these individuals and groups have been invited into the process early and have been included as key stakeholders. If participants feel as though the outcome is their plan, they are less likely to oppose it. By working side-by-side with other stakeholders, they learn to appreciate and accommodate others’ points of view.

Moreover, opposing groups often bring legitimate concerns to the design process. Through their involvement they can improve projects.

Seasonal residents are often ignored because they are sometimes not viewed as a true part of the community; they include condo residents, migrant workers, members of the military, and merchant marines. Although their members may not be able to attend public events in person, representatives of seasonal residents (including organizations such as migrant worker education groups, healthcare providers, homeowners’ associations, property managers, military officials, and operators of ports, marinas, and resorts) can become liaisons between their constituents and the project leaders, and are well-positioned to share timely and important information both ways.



Children

Children have much to offer in the community planning and design process, yet they remain mostly untapped throughout community transformation processes. A child's imagination is a powerful tool; children can dream the perfect community in which to live, play, and go to school. Beyond the power of their imaginations, they can also bring very practical solutions to the table. For example, children are often aware of shortcuts that could be formalized into trails and added to the community's pedestrian network map. Their values and honesty helps raise the discussion to the level of



*Public workshops should engage all groups, including children
(Credit: Broward MPO)*

guiding principles; the involvement of children in public processes can change the whole tenor of the event. Engage children through children's charrettes, art or urban design contests, school field trips, and special activities at community charrettes or workshops. Invite them on walking audits near their schools. At the very least, provide schools with flyers announcing the project or public process that can be sent home with children in their bags.

Toolbox: Media Outreach

Conducting effective outreach to news outlets is important to the success of any community engagement effort. The news media are more than simply a means to get the word out about the project. Rather, project leaders should try to build capacity among news organizations, just as the outreach effort seeks to build capacity among community members; building relationships with reporters helps ensure the general public is receiving accurate, timely, and meaningful information about the project.

The lead agency's communications department should be consulted to provide guidance, expertise, and tools, but project leaders should remain very engaged in the media outreach effort. Project leaders should be committed to working within the agency's communications protocols, such as complying with a gatekeeper policy if one exists. If a communications department isn't available, the following paragraphs provide general guidance.



BETTER BLOCK

FORT LAUDERDALE, FL

FLAGLER
VILLAGE



NW 1st AVE 500 BLOCK
between NW 5th and 6th Streets

A LIVING CHARETTE

presented by Cadence + FAU School of Urban and Regional Planning + FAT Village Arts District

JUNE 16, 2012 10:00 AM
- 6:00 PM



Better Block is an urban design exhibit, demonstrating how temporary streetscape improvements, pop-up businesses, local culture, and street life can improve community connection.

DEMONSTRATE.

EDUCATE.

CONNECT.



Better Block - NW 1st Ave.
FORT LAUDERDALE.

Cadence. April 2012.

*Experience a shared street, where the automobile, the bike, the pedestrian and businesses utilize the street space together.

To help us build a **BETTER BLOCK**

email: BetterBlockFtL@cadence-living.com

follow the movement

f [facebook.com/BetterBlockFtL](https://www.facebook.com/BetterBlockFtL)

#BetterBlockFtL

w betterblock.org

cadence
planning + designing living environments



Example of a promotional flyer announcing an event
(Credit: Cadence and Florida Atlantic University)



Call Key Outlets Early

As soon as the project kickoff is confirmed or possibly even earlier, call—don't email, fax, or send a letter—key reporters to share the purpose of the project and to ask them how best to provide more information when it is available. Keep a list of the contacts made and how they would like to receive additional information; then, be sure to follow up in that manner.

Depending on the news organization and its depth and structure, special effort should be made to reach transportation, public safety, and health and business reporters. Contact the primary news sources in local and regional markets, but don't overlook non-traditional news sources, such as blogs that cater to cyclists or that address transportation, public safety, community health, retirement, and business issues. Any key reporters—regardless of their medium—should be contacted as soon as possible by phone.

Also, offer to submit a guest commentary in advance of the project kick-off or to secure a prominent guest for an upcoming talk show. If the project may be especially controversial, try to schedule an editorial board meeting with the local or regional paper.

Issue Meaningful News Releases

Develop a news release that is engaging and written in the form of a news story. Be sure to include the five W's—who, what, why, when, and where. Describe the goal of the project, how people can become involved, and any other information that will help make the story meaningful and relevant to the local and regional audience. Include keywords to ensure the news release and its contents can be easily found online. Distribute the news release initially to the key media outlets already contacted, and be sure to provide it in the manner they requested (check the list made during the initial conversations). Then, distribute the news release to all other media outlets in the region. Also, consider including non-traditional news sources in the media outreach strategy.

Finally, distribute the news release to local partners and other local contacts, asking them to share it with their media contacts. The value of the relationships the local partners already have with media contacts shouldn't be overlooked; tap into that value by supporting the local partners in their efforts to conduct media outreach for the benefit of the workshop and related efforts.

Be Responsive and Keep in Touch

As project leaders build relationships with news sources, they should expect to receive more and more inquiries. Understand that reporters often are working on very tight deadlines; sometimes they receive story assignments mid-day with evening deadlines. Be responsive and provide timely information to help ensure accurate details are relayed to news audiences and to further support the relationship with the reporter. Additionally, be proactive in sharing news about project developments or milestones being met; doing so will further build capacity amongst the news sources, help keep them engaged in the project, and support the dissemination of timely and accurate information.



Media as Stakeholders

Conventional community outreach plans have treated the media as a means of simply disseminating information. A more effective approach is to engage members of traditional and non-traditional news outlets alike (newspapers, television, radio, online news services, bloggers, etc.) as stakeholders and seek their involvement early in the process. Just as project leaders should build capacity amongst residents and within the community, so too should they seek to build capacity with journalists and news outlets. The media can also help projects move forward with positive editorials and favorable reporting.

FOSTER CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Ensuring that programs and messages are designed to be relevant, appropriate, and effective in different cultures and different languages is vital to conducting successful community outreach. In fact, cultural competence has emerged as a key strategy to improving health and the quality of healthcare and social services for everyone in the U.S. regardless of race, ethnicity, cultural background, or language proficiency.

Translating important messages requires strong cultural knowledge, because “simply replacing one word with another won't do” (Zarcadoolas, C. and Blanco, M., “Lost in Translation: Each Word Accurate, Yet...,” *Managed Care Magazine*, August 2000). But reaching people of all backgrounds



Stakeholders share the planning responsibility
(Credit: Ryan Snyder)

often requires more than simply translating messages. Even in urban communities, but especially in rural areas or small towns, messages perceived to have been created by “outsiders” can actually do more harm than good by creating discomfort or mistrust.

To increase their effectiveness, many organizations working with multi-cultural populations are developing “ambassador” programs that recruit people who live in and work in a community to be community educators and liaisons between the project or program and the community. Other communities are working to culturally adapt messages, instead of simply translating them, to focus on types of behavior changes that would be relevant and appropriate in the cultural context of the different audiences.



When culturally adapting messages, consider the following:

- Language doesn't equal culture. Although a shared language is important to culture, people who speak the same language often are from different cultures. Be sensitive to the differences and develop appropriate messages.
- Start with strong cultural knowledge. Tap the knowledge of in-house staff or consultants who live, work, or grew up in the culture.
- Get feedback. Work directly with members of the audience to determine appropriate approaches. Use focus groups to screen messages before they are distributed.

EXPECT EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS—AND REACTIONS—TO THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

People have strong emotional connections to their built environments, and those feelings influence involvement in community-building efforts. The structures and infrastructure around people create strong frames of reference for daily living and help build comfort, a sense of security, and a sense of belonging.

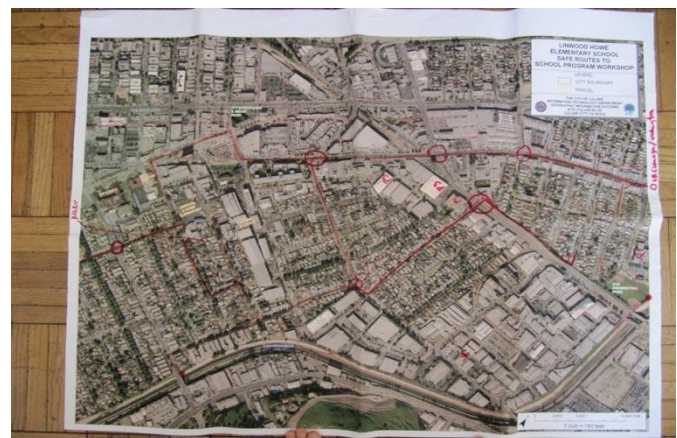
Place attachment is a notable part of daily life. Project leaders should anticipate that responses to projects may be emotional, but those responses shouldn't be dismissed as invalid; they should be addressed as valuable input.

APPROACH ENGAGEMENT AS A TWO-WAY CONVERSATION

Effective public engagement involves more than telling people about a project; effective engagement facilitates a dialogue that leads to reciprocal learning, collaboration, and ideally, consensus.

Community members have unique knowledge of local contexts that will affect the outcome of a project development process. By engaging in reciprocal learning, project leaders will gain insight and perspective that can help them ensure the project is tailored to meet the community's needs. Community members also will learn from each other.

An effective public process results in people feeling that they are well-informed and that they've had opportunities to contribute throughout the stages of decision-making.



Product of a design charrette (Credit: Ryan Snyder)

"In fact, what appears to be most important from a citizen's perspective and from the standpoint of attaining ongoing engagement is not the strategy employed, but how



government responds when citizens voice their preferences. For citizens, there are two questions that are paramount: Did the government listen and take action based on what they heard from us? Was it worth my time and effort?" (*Connected Communities: Local Government as a Partner in Citizen Engagement and Community Building*, Alliance for Innovation, Oct. 2010).

In addition to workshops, project leaders can seek community input through interactive online tools such as websites, digital storytelling, and community mapping. In communities with many seasonal residents, these tools can be especially useful in collecting input from stakeholders who aren't able to attend events in person.

Digital storytelling allows the public to use photos and presentation tools to illustrate concerns about the built environment. Many communities are starting to use this "photo voice" approach to encourage community members to present their points of view using photographs and descriptions or narration. The package can be submitted electronically to project leaders or presented as part of a public workshop or event.

ACHIEVING INFORMED CONSENT

The goal of informed consent is not compromise, where everyone must give up something. Informed consent is based on the assumption that most people will give their consent to a change, even when it is not in their personal best interest, after they have been engaged, become informed, and see the value to their community. Although this requires altruism, there are many reasons why it succeeds other than people wanting to leave something behind as a legacy. Working cooperatively, all people achieve more, and so enlightened self-interest wins, once people understand why an idea is good for their neighborhood.



*Stakeholders designing their streets
(Credit: Dan Burden)*

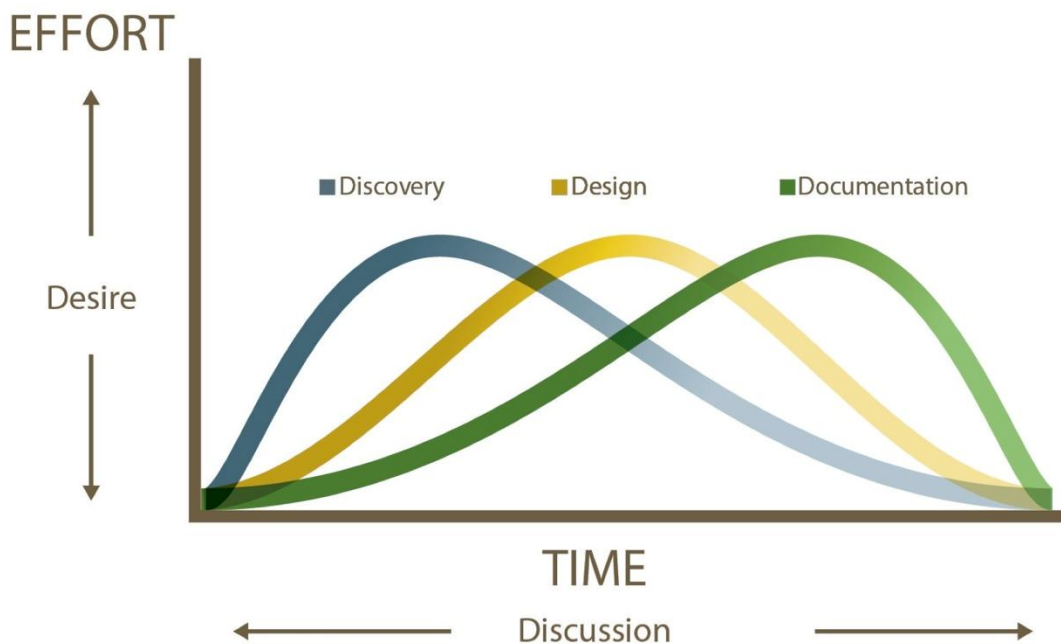
The steps of the informed consent process are as follows:

- **Desire.** The public process comes about as a result of a community coalescing around a desire for a change in its built form. Though desire comes in different forms, it is the



necessary energy and often passion used to steer the project towards a sustainable and community-oriented outcome.

- **Discovery.** Discovery is the process of developing a complete and common understanding of the situation, context, and the built vision by the design team and the stakeholders. Context is a short form for the physical, social, historical, fiscal, environmental, political, and climatic contexts. Good discovery is done by:
 - Listening, looking, and involving people
 - Visiting, reading, and probing
 - Educating and exploring physically and intellectually
- **Design.** Design is the employment of people, their related skills, and what they discovered to produce products that articulate, memorialize, and motivate people towards the consensus outcomes and the vision. It tends to be the most exciting part of the process. This is when collaborators can raise the bar in terms of creativity and sustainability.



*Steps of the informed consent process
 (Credit: Michele Weisbart, adapted from Ian Lockwood)*

- **Discussion.** Discussion happens throughout and requires the right people/stakeholders with the capabilities present at the right times in order to maximize short feedback loops. It is the discussion phase that builds and overcomes uninformed decision making. If grassroots planning is to work, people must become informed on what helps build a community. With the combination of a strong desire and community leadership the sense of frustration will be overcome, but this must come with an informed neighborhood. Discussion involves:
 - A series of presentations to raise stakeholders' knowledge.



- Testing/viewing the design and parts of the design from a variety of perspectives.
- Circling back to alter parts that need altering.
- The project manager must prepare the community to "sell" its vision to others. True ownership of a vision comes from within.
- Documentation. Documentation starts at the beginning of the project but the effort is highest towards the end when the products are finalized. Example products include documents, posters, codes, speeches, agreements, construction drawings, and advice. This documentation works best when designers anticipate pushback. Messages must be clear, concise, comprehensive, and attractive to draw people in.

CARRY THE MOMENTUM FORWARD

Successful community engagement often leads people to become motivated and ready to mobilize to enact positive change. Project leaders should capitalize on this energy and help form long-lasting coalitions by organizing a working group or advisory council that will help carry the momentum forward. The members of the group should represent diverse interests and backgrounds and should be committed to continuing to communicate with each other and meeting regularly to address the issues identified through the project development process. The group can be established to provide guidance and continuing community feedback to project leaders as implementation begins.

Celebrating early successes helps ensure long-term project success. When project implementation begins, identify an early achievement and widely publicize the success; this can even be the project's public process itself. Consider holding a special event that will publicize the new community asset, bring recognition to the people involved, reaffirm that the process has worked, and build more support for work to be done. For example, the completion of a trail or trail segment could be celebrated with a special family fun run/walk held in conjunction with a ribbon-cutting ceremony and press conference. Widely celebrating projects like these helps people in nearby communities envision how they can improve their neighborhoods as well.



*Community celebrates and supports their achievements
(Credit: Michael Ronkin)*



Toolbox: Strategies for Implementation

The following strategies can be helpful in implementing projects:

- Secure and leverage the support of key partners early. They may be members of the chamber of commerce, influential elected leaders, chief planners of agencies, or community advocates. Leverage their support by ensuring other key partners are aware of their buy-in.
- Use data appropriately. Too many towns don't implement projects because they lack data, or conversely, they rely on it too heavily. Presented with too much, people may argue over its meaning, leading to projects not being built and community members losing trust in project leaders. Some data is needed to ensure the context is properly understood. Thus, conducting research to collect basic data is necessary, but street design projects also should be driven by commonly held values in the community.
- Build model projects. Model projects can be examples of how streets can work better, especially when building something that is new for the community, such as a non-conventional crossing, a road diet, reverse-in angled parking, mini-circles, or roundabouts. Build model projects first in areas with strong backers and the greatest chances for success. If the vision is to have modern roundabouts in a dozen locations, start with the location with the most enthusiasm and support. Enlist local leaders to attend meetings, submit letters to the editor, and conduct other outreach that explains why the neighborhood wants the new feature.
- Evaluate built projects. Don't just build a project: evaluate it. For example, a 30 percent increase in people walking, 20 percent more bicyclists, a reduction in vehicle speeds of 7 mph, 120 column inches of positive newspaper coverage, and other metrics can validate the project and build support for similar projects. Use other performance-based measures to evaluate success not only of the project, but also of the public process that led to it. Evaluations can assess the assumptions and the planning processes that lead to changes. Assessment of the planning process includes evaluations of how well the project performed. Evaluation can include the following:
 - Did the project meet the commonly-held community vision?
 - Important projects that benefit all members of the community are the first to be built. Did those built reflect the community's priorities?
 - Did the project provide long-term benefits to all people?
 - Did the process allow for adequate time to respond to plans?
 - Were there any legal actions or complaints about the public process that could have been reduced or eliminated?
 - How can the public process improve?



CONCLUSION

Creating successful community engagement through effective outreach is a significant investment of resources, but many of those resources already exist in-house and simply need to be committed to the effort. For policy-making bodies, government agencies, health agencies, and community organizations that understand the value, benefits, and processes of creating successful community engagement, the effort provides a clear return on investment.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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Manzo, L. and Perkins, D. "Finding Common Ground: The Importance of Place Attachment to Community Participation and Planning." *Journal of Planning Literature*. May 2006, 20(4):335-350.

Federal Highway Administration. "Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making." <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/charrett.htm>