



Communications and Civic Engagement

Effective Public Engagement through Strategic Communication

Strategic communication is an essential tool for effective public engagement. This tip sheet offers advice on communication strategies before, during and after the agency's public engagement effort.

The Public Engagement Process



I. Before the Agency Begins a Public Engagement Effort:

Understand the Audiences

In order to effectively communicate about a public process or program, the starting point is to understand who the agency seeks to engage.

- Identify key audiences and stakeholders. What are their interests? How do they connect to the project or policy?
- Identify the community values, commonly held principles or valued qualities, such as personal safety, freedom or fairness. Understanding this can help you craft your message.
- Ask stakeholders about their preferences regarding communication. What communications channels work best for them? Getting this perspective during planning both enhances understanding of these key audiences and creates a valuable communication channel for further engagement.
- Understand connections and relationships among audiences and individuals. Who are their trusted advisors? How willing are these influencers to act? Understanding these dynamics can help the agency broaden the impact of its engagement effort.

With the above information in mind, the agency can identify and prioritize communication channels that align with the needs, opportunities and resources of both the project or policy and the audiences that the agency seeks to engage.

Consider Both the Message and the Messenger

In developing a message for a policy or project, succinctly and clearly articulate the message.

- What is at stake for the community.
- Why the audience should care. Explain how the decision could affect what different people value.
- The action the agency wants the agency the audience to take. For example, is the goal to help inform people, help them analyze and weigh in on different solutions to a problem, or take a specific step?
- What will happen if audience members do take action. Consider the choice of messenger and how it will affect the way in which people will receive the agency's message.
- Identify and support community champions who can speak with authenticity and power to the issue or need being addressed.
- Consider developing an outreach working group to help extend the agency's ability to reach into different audiences in the community.
- Empower community members as storytellers. Personal perspective on a proposed policy or project can be compelling to broader audiences and the media. Tie the agency's communication plan to the policy or project consideration process.
- What are the policy or project decision-making milestones?
- How will the agency communicate progress towards key decision-making milestones?
- How will the agency communicate how public input influenced the final outcomes of the decision-making process? Tie the agency's communication plan to the policy or project consideration process.
- What are the policy or project decision-making milestones?
- How will the agency communicate progress towards key decision-making milestones?
- How will the agency communicate how public input influenced the final outcomes of the decision-making process?

Create a Media Plan that Integrates Both Traditional (Print, Radio and Television) and Online Outlets

- Develop key story themes and messengers.
 - Find the right community partners and champions to help spread the agency's information and messages.
 - Develop a sequence of messages that tie to key milestones in the policy or project.
 - Scale the level of media activity to fit the time frames and capacities of the media outlets and contacts in the area.
- Create a list of media, reporters, key bloggers and online journalists who reach priority audiences.
 - Identify both larger and smaller community-based publications and outlets, including radio. Be sure to include the newsletters, blogs and events of key community partners.
 - Consider the different types of reporters and outlets who might cover various angles of the story (health, real estate, living, local agency beat, ethnic media, etc.).
- Create a planning calendar for the decision-making process on the policy or project.
 - Include key milestones, events, news happenings and announcements that can engage the public.

- Plug into other activities related to the policy or project topic locally, nationally and even internationally.
- Brainstorm different ways to slice the story to ensure ongoing coverage.
- List the different news opportunities (for example, at launch, when funding is secured, when a proposal is made, when success is achieved). Find the other relevant angles (for example, health, sustainability, education). Identify submission opportunities for opinion pieces and who are the right spokespeople and storytellers.
- Monitor the media for opportunities to respond to other related stories with information about your policy or project.

II. During the Public Engagement Process:

Create opportunities for Sustaining Communication

Public engagement efforts are most successful when spokespeople consider context, content and commitment in relation to the audiences they seek to reach.

- Create opportunities for engagement through channels and events both within and outside of the public agency.
- Offer multiple opportunities for the public to communicate back to the agency (surveys, online forums and meetings) to reflect that different groups will have different preferences in terms of communications channels.
- Show progress, new information or actions as proactively and quickly as possible.
- Follow up on commitments made (for example, to get answers to questions) and (when possible) immediately ask for feedback about the agency's communications and engagement efforts.
- Recognize and thank partners and collaborating stakeholders for their efforts during the engagement process.

Expand Opportunities for Sustained Interaction with the Media to Maximize Strategic Communication and Public Engagement

- Train spokespeople on the needs and tendencies of media representatives.
- Develop relationships with key reporters and outlets:
 - Be respectful of deadlines.
 - Provide them with only story ideas their audiences will care about.
 - Understand which outlets do and do not have reporters who routinely cover your topic, and adjust the background material you provide accordingly.
 - Don't ask to review a quote or the story.
 - Ask for corrections only if there are grave factual errors.
 - Give them information they ask for even if it is not relevant to the policy or project.
- Pitch news stories and submit opinion pieces consistent with the agency's planning calendar.
Consider an editorial board meeting with the local daily newspaper at the beginning of the effort.
Another possibility is an "educational" news briefing with background information for outlets that do not have a reporter on that beat (such as ethnic media, recently downsized local papers, radio, etc.)
- Communicate progress points and/or key lessons along the way to support champions and demonstrate that the community conversation is influencing the decision-making process.
- Invite media to all community meetings and make spokespeople available for interviews.

- Be prepared to take advantage of opportunities to react to news events. Have drafts of op-eds and letters to the editor that the right community member or other stakeholder can review, sign and submit quickly.
- Share media coverage with priority audiences (for example, provide printouts at community meetings, post on the agency's website and share through other online tools).

III. After the Public Engagement Process:

Measure and Evaluate the Engagement

At the conclusion of an engagement process, use quantitative and qualitative metrics to evaluate, adjust and improve your strategy. Lessons learned from both successful and unsuccessful strategies can help to refine the agency's understanding of the values, interests and concerns of audiences and stakeholders. This will benefit future engagement efforts.

- Gather qualitative data through surveys, interviews, focus groups or informal channels.
- Use process measures to assess what you did including:
 - Materials distributed,
 - Outreach conducted,
 - Media engaged, and
 - Staff, friends, partners and others reached.
- Use outcome measures to assess what happened:
 - Did you achieve the goals?
 - How many new people did you reach?
 - Did you receive positive media coverage?
 - Who used the key messages?
 - Did you earn endorsements?
 - Who got involved and what did they do?
- Ask for feedback and advice from stakeholders.

Additional Information

To learn more about measuring public engagement success, visit the Institute for Local Government's public engagement resources at (www.ca-ilg.org/public-engagement)

Create Opportunities for Ongoing Communication and Concentrate on Maintaining the Relationships with Stakeholders

As with any relationship, maintaining communication after an engagement effort has been completed will ensure that audiences and stakeholders stay informed-making them more likely to participate in future efforts.

- Share findings and lessons learned from debriefing and performance assessments.
- Circle back to stakeholders with information that shows how their efforts made a difference. Thank them for their involvement.
- Use existing venues (governing body meetings, public events) and resources (website, e-mail newsletters) to celebrate new approaches, new relationships or specific successful outcomes that highlight partners or collaborating stakeholders.
- Create an ongoing network for information sharing with stakeholders and community groups.
- Look for ways to support or connect with stakeholders during the periods between major engagement efforts.

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About the Institute for Local Government

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For more information and to access the Institute's resources on public engagement, visit www.ca-ilg.org/public-engagement.

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City Use of SOCIAL MEDIA:

Legal & Other Considerations

By Melissa Kuehne

Nearly 75 percent of Americans now use social media. According to the Pew Research Center, as of August 2018, two-thirds (67 percent) of Americans reported that they get at least some of their news on social media including, for the first time, more than half (55 percent) of those age 50 or older. Americans are also now more likely than ever to get news from multiple social media sites, with approximately one quarter of all U.S. adults (26 percent) getting news from two or more social media sites. This is in contrast to a drop in daily newspaper circulation (down 11 percent) and viewership of cable evening news (down 12 percent), network morning news (down 10 percent) and local morning news (down 15 percent).

These statistics illustrate some of the reasons that cities statewide are increasingly experimenting with and expanding their use of social media. In addition to the pervasiveness of social media use among Americans, online platforms like social media offer cities a number of community engagement and transparency benefits.

“Our city is relatively new to social media, opening its first accounts in 2016,” says Alexa Davis, assistant to the city manager for Rolling Hills Estates. “The city is on Facebook, Instagram and NextDoor and is experimenting with livestreaming via Facebook Live to better engage with our community, be responsive to concerns and share city news and events.”

Cities are building social media into their communications plans to help disseminate information and promote city events and projects. In addition, social media can encourage engagement from community members who may not normally get involved in civic matters because of time or transportation constraints, language barriers or other obstacles. Allowing residents to provide feedback and comments beyond in-person public forums and council meetings can provide cities with a broader picture of community values and perspectives. This open dialogue and engagement gives residents more access to the city decision-making process, which typically results in greater transparency.

“Maintaining an active social media presence allows me to share information and connect with my constituents — especially the younger generations — in a meaningful way,” says San Luis Obispo Mayor Heidi Harmon. “I hope to encourage and inspire my community to get involved with the city and in the decisionmaking process.”

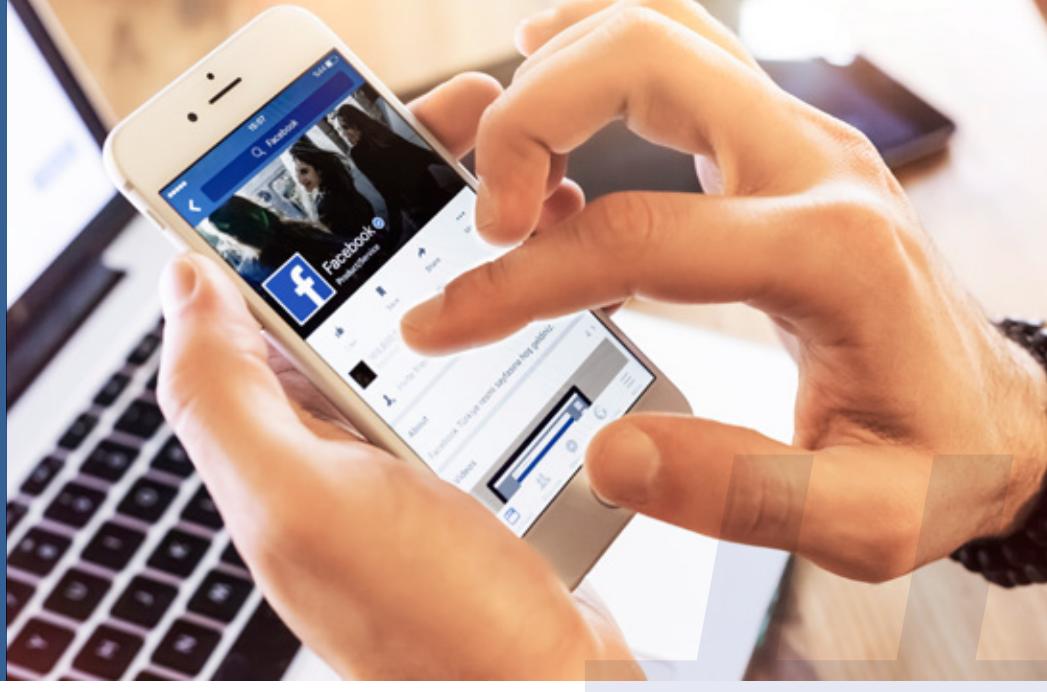
Challenges Related to Social Media

Although social media offers benefits and opportunities for cities, it also has some potential challenges.

For example, cities and other entities often struggle with how to manage their social media presence. A choice must be made about whether the site management is centralized as a function of the public information officer or communications staff or is decentralized to department staff. Centralized management more easily enables consistent messaging, branding and posting but it can also be

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Online platforms like social media offer cities a number of community engagement and transparency benefits.



time consuming. Although decentralized management allows staff with subject-matter expertise to post content and may create more buy-in and ownership from staff, it likely also creates the need for more upfront training of staff and oversight by communications and/or executive staff to ensure appropriate messaging.

Another consideration is staff time. Though some platforms can assist staff by allowing posts to be scheduled ahead of time, staff time still needs to be allocated to developing new content and responding to emerging stories and issues. As with all communications in a 24-hour news cycle world, it is important to set and manage expectations about response time to comments and messages.

There may also be a concern that only people with negative comments and opinions will engage. Adopting a social media policy with clear guidelines on how the site is moderated — such as no offensive or profane language, comments must be relevant to the related post, no personal attacks, etc. — can help staff address some of these concerns.

Legal Considerations

Currently not much legal precedent exists related to what cities can and cannot do on social media. However, when making decisions about how to engage on social media, cities should take a number of legal considerations into account. It is also always advisable to consult your city attorney if you have questions.

The Brown Act

The Brown Act requires governing bodies of local agencies to conduct open and public meetings, subject to limited exceptions, and to post meeting agendas in advance. It also prohibits “serial meetings” — a series of communications that results in a majority of decisionmakers conferring on an issue. This prohibition applies to electronic communications such as email and therefore may extend to interactions and comments on social media channels as well. For example, if a majority of the council comments on or likes the same post, this could be considered a “serial meeting” and trigger a Brown Act violation. It is also important to note that the Brown Act becomes applicable when candidates are elected, and not just when they take office.

The Public Records Act

The Public Records Act, subject to specified exemptions, requires public agencies to make documents created, used or possessed by the agency available to the public upon request. It is not currently clear which records cities are required to keep in relation to social media — whether just the posts and comments of the city itself or all comments on city posts. It is also unclear if the internet archives of the social media pages are sufficient or if cities need to download and save all records on their servers with other files.



continued

Due Process

Constitutional due process principles require a decisionmaker to be fair and impartial when the decisionmaking body is sitting in what is known as a “quasi-judicial” capacity. Quasi-judicial matters include variances, use permits, annexation protests, personnel disciplinary actions and licenses. Quasi-judicial proceedings tend to involve the application of common requirements or principles to specific situations, much as a judge applies the law to a particular set of facts. If conversations about proposed city projects occur on social media sites, this may be considered a violation of the “ex parte communications” doctrine, which suggests that in quasi-judicial matters all communications to decision-makers about the merits (or demerits) of an issue should occur in the context of the noticed hearing.

First Amendment Considerations

Another legal question arises around whether elected officials can block users and whether or not that constitutes a violation of the free speech clause of the First Amendment. A recent case, *Davison v. Loudoun County Board of Supervisors*, examines this issue. In this case, the chair of the Loudon County Board of Supervisors blocked a constituent from her Facebook page for approximately 12 hours. The

constituent then sued, alleging this was a violation of his First Amendment and due process rights. The U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia found that the operation of the Facebook page created a “public forum” and therefore by blocking the constituent on the basis of his viewpoint constituted a violation of his First Amendment rights. However, the court also noted that public officials may moderate comments on their social media pages, and that it may not always violate the First Amendment to ban or block commenters from social media platforms. While this decision has no direct impact on California cities, it offers an interesting case study of how other jurisdictions are grappling with this complex issue.

For more information on the ethics laws mentioned here, visit www.ca-ilg.org/ethics.

Tips to Consider

Include social media in the orientation for newly elected officials. Many — if not most — cities conduct orientations for new council members covering city ordinances and state laws that council members need to understand and keep in mind. It may be helpful to include social media in this discussion to share your city’s social media policy (if one exists) or share some of the legal considerations mentioned here as they make

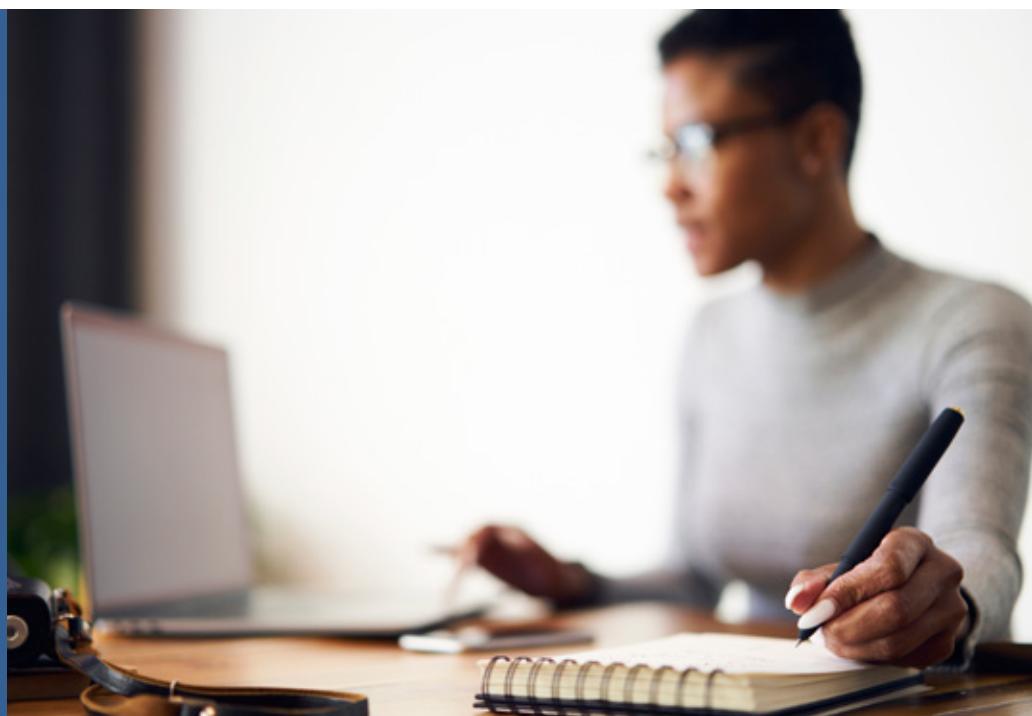
More Information Online

For additional information and links to related resources, read the online version of this article at www.westerncity.com.

the transition from candidate to council member. For example, suggest that they should at least be mindful of who else is commenting — particularly other council members — when they are considering commenting on social media posts.

Create a social media policy. Such a policy can set parameters on the branding, messaging and content for city-administered pages and outline policies for moderating discussions — for example, provide specific guidelines on moderating comments on Facebook. In addition, policies can outline which city staff members have the ability to post and/or the approval process for posting to social media channels. The Institute for Local Government offers a number of sample social media policies for cities to reference. For more information, visit www.ca-ilg.org/social-media-strategies. ■

Adopting a social media policy with clear guidelines on how the site is moderated can help staff address concerns.





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What is Public Engagement?

There are many terms that describe the involvement of the public in civic and political life. We offer one set of terms and definitions here not because we're sure these definitions are the best or most complete – or even that most people would agree with them - but because we think it's important to draw distinctions among the various ways people can become involved. This is important because understanding these differences will help local officials "fit" the best approach (or approaches) to the issue, policy or controversy at hand. The exact terms and definitions are less important than recognizing that these distinctions exist.

Why Should I do it?

Local governments throughout California are applying a variety of public engagement strategies and approaches to address issues ranging from land use and budgeting to climate change and public safety. They are discovering a number of benefits that can result from the successful engagement of their residents in local decision making.

What is Public Engagement?

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

This is an extremely broad term that includes the many ways that residents involve themselves in the civic and political life of their community. It encompasses volunteering as a local Little League coach, attending neighborhood or community-wide meetings, helping to build a community playground, joining a city or county clean-up effort, becoming a member of a neighborhood watch group or local commission – and much more.

PUBLIC INFORMATION/OUTREACH

This kind of public engagement is characterized by one-way local government communication to residents to inform them about a public problem, issue or policy matter.

Examples could include: a website article describing the agency's current budget situation; a mailing to neighborhood residents about a planned housing complex; or a presentation by a health department to a community group about substandard housing or "bird" flu policies.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION/DELIBERATION

This form of public engagement refers to those processes through which participants receive new information on the topic at hand and through discussion and deliberation jointly prioritize or agree on ideas and/or recommendations intended to inform the decisions of local officials.

Examples include community conversations that provide information on the budget and the budget process and ask participants to discuss community priorities, confront real trade-offs, and craft their collective recommendations; or the development of a representative group of residents who draw on community input and suggest elements and ideas for a general plan update.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

This is a general term we are using for a broad range of methods through which members of the public become more informed about and/or influence public decisions. Given our work to support good public involvement in California, we are especially focused on how local officials use public involvement practices to help inform residents and help guide the policy decisions and actions of local government.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

This kind of public engagement generally includes instances where local officials ask for the individual views or recommendations of residents about public actions and decisions, and where there is generally little or no discussion to add additional knowledge and insight and promote an exchange of viewpoints.

Examples include typical public hearings and council or board comment periods, as well as resident surveys and polls. A public meeting that is mainly focused on asking for "raw" individual opinions and recommendations about budget recommendations would fit in this category.

SUSTAINED PUBLIC PROBLEM SOLVING

This form of public engagement typically takes place through the work of place-based committees or task forces, often with multi-sector membership, that over an extended period of time address public problems through collaborative planning, implementation, monitoring and/or assessment.

Why Engage the Public?



BETTER IDENTIFICATION OF THE PUBLIC'S VALUES, IDEAS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Elections help identify voter preferences and communication with individual constituents provide additional information to local officials about resident views on various topics. However gaps often remain in understanding the public's views and preferences on proposed public agency actions and decisions. This can especially be the case for residents or populations that tend to participate less frequently or when simple "pro" or "con" views don't help solve the problem at hand. Good public engagement can provide more nuanced and collective views about an issue by a broader spectrum of residents.



MORE INFORMED RESIDENTS - ABOUT ISSUES AND ABOUT LOCAL AGENCIES

Most residents do not regularly follow local policy matters carefully. While a relatively small number do, most community members are not familiar, for instance, with the ins and outs of a local agency budget and budget process, or knowledgeable about planning for a new general plan, open space use or affordable housing. Good public engagement can present opportunities for residents to better understand an issue and its impacts and to see local agency challenges as their challenges as well.



IMPROVED LOCAL AGENCY DECISION - MAKING AND ACTIONS, WITH BETTER IMPACTS AND OUTCOMES

Members of the public have information about their community's history and needs. They also have a sense of the kind of place where they and their families want to live. They can add new voices and new ideas to enrich thinking and planning on topics that concern them. This kind of knowledge, integrated appropriately into local decision making, helps ensure that public decisions are optimal for the community and best fit current conditions and needs.



MORE COMMUNITY BUY-IN AND SUPPORT, WITH LESS CONTENTIOUSNESS

Public engagement by residents and others can generate more support for the final decisions reached by local decision makers. Put simply, participation helps generate ownership. Involved residents who have helped to shape a proposed policy, project or program will better understand the issue itself and the reasons for the decisions that are made. Good communications about the public's involvement in a local decision can increase the support of the broader community as well.



MORE CIVIL DISCUSSIONS AND DECISION MAKING

Earlier, informed and facilitated deliberation by residents will frequently offer a better chance for more civil and reasoned conversations and problem solving than public hearings and other less collaborative opportunities for public input.



FASTER PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION WITH LESS NEED TO REVISIT AGAIN

Making public decisions is one thing; successfully implementing these decisions is often something else altogether. The buy-in discussed above, and the potential for broad agreement on a decision, are important contributors to faster implementation. For instance, a cross section of the community may come together to work on a vision or plan that includes a collective sense of what downtown building height limits should be. If this is adopted by the local agency and guides planning and development over time, the issue will be less likely to reoccur as an issue for the community and for local officials. In general, good public engagement reduces the need for unnecessary decision-making “do-over.”



MORE TRUST - IN EACH OTHER AND IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Whatever their differences, people who work together on common problems usually have more appreciation of the problem and of each other. Many forms of public engagement provide opportunity to get behind peoples’ statements and understand the reasons for what they think and say. This helps enhance understanding and respect among the participants. It also inspires confidence that problems can be solved – which promotes more cooperation over time. Whether called social capital, community building, civic pride or good citizenship, such experiences help build stronger communities. Additionally, when a local agency promotes and is a part of these processes - and takes the ideas and recommendations of the public seriously - a greater trust and confidence in local government often results.



HIGHER RATES OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Engaging the public in new ways offers additional opportunities for people to take part in the civic and political life of their community. This may include community members who have traditionally participated less than others. These are avenues for not only contributing to local decisions but for residents to gain knowledge, experience and confidence in the workings of their local government. These are future neighborhood volunteers, civic and community leaders, commissioners and elected officials. In whatever role they choose, these are individuals who will be more prepared and more qualified as informed residents, involved citizens and future leaders.

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For more information and to access the Institute’s resources on public engagement, visit www.ca-ilg.org/publicengagement.

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Providing Language Access ➤

TIPS FOR LOCAL OFFICIALS !



Did you know...

6.9 Million

Californians have
Limited English
Proficiency (LEP)

68%
are Spanish
speakers followed by
Chinese, Vietnamese,
Tagalog and Korean.

- **The California Civil Rights Act** prohibits discrimination by agencies that receive state funds and requires them to provide equal access to benefits.
- **The Bilingual Services Act** requires local agencies to provide language access services to limited English-proficient speakers. Providing language access in some circumstances may be the only way to facilitate public participation in California's communities.

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Tips for Providing Language Access Services

- 1 Connect language access efforts to the larger mission and goals of the local agency.
- 2 Develop policies that clarify your local agency's responsibilities for providing bilingual services and ensure that local officials understand these policies, responsibilities and existing language access services and resources.
- 3 Partner with community-based organizations and ethnic media to better identify language access priorities, ensure accurate and culturally appropriate interpretation and translation and more fully assess the effectiveness of language access plans.
- 4 Translate print and online materials explaining services into languages spoken by a substantial number of LEP residents. Minimize the use of bureaucratic or legal jargon when creating all new documents.
- 5 Create web pages that are easy to navigate and use. Web pages may ease fears of immigrant residents who may not feel comfortable seeking services in person.
- 6 Encourage local departments to consider using California Multiple Award Schedules (CMAS) contracts to obtain bilingual services whenever cost-effective.
- 7 Use bilingual employees effectively and appropriately. Avoid assumptions about competence and willingness of bilingual staff to provide language services.

Resources to learn more:

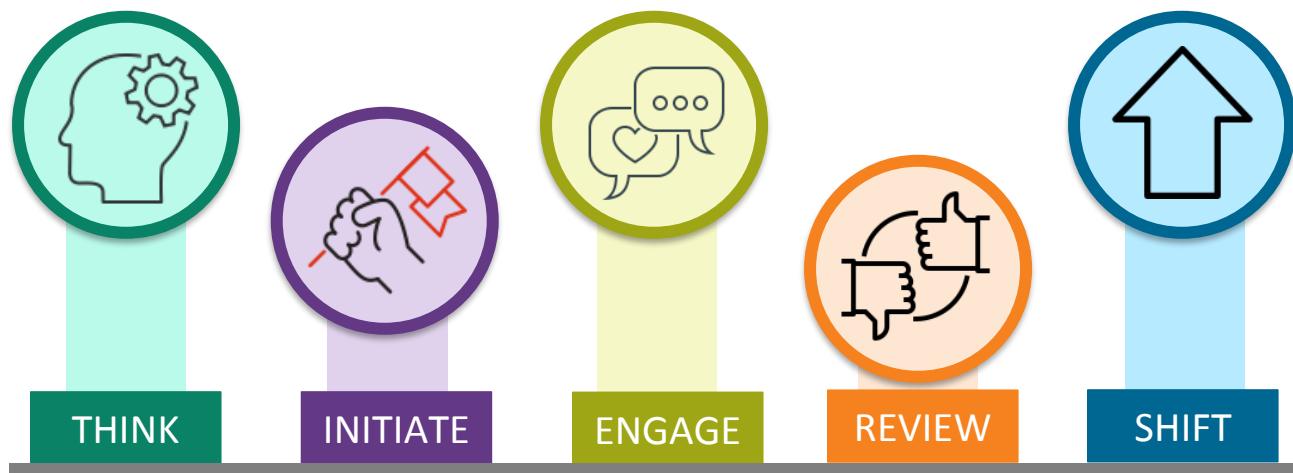
Language Access Laws and Legal Issues A Local Official's Guide |
www.ca-ilg.org/language-access-laws-and-legal-issues

Ten Ideas to Encourage Immigrant Engagement | www.ca-ilg.org/ten-ideas-immigrant-engagement

Increasing Outreach | www.ca-ilg.org/increasing-outreach

ca-ilg.org

Shaping the Future Together: TIERSSM Framework for Practical Public Engagement at the Local Level



The Institute for Local Government (ILG) has developed a framework to support and assist any local government with planning and executing public engagement efforts. The Framework consists of five pillars for successful community engagement: Think, Initiate, Engage, Review and Shift.

Why TIERS? The TIERS Public Engagement Framework has been developed in direct response to what we have heard from local elected officials and staff across California. In 2015, ILG conducted a statewide survey and found that 69 percent of respondents said they do not have the sufficient staff, knowledge and financial resources for public engagement. These findings mirrored the results of a 2013 ILG & Public Agenda survey which found that 69 percent of respondents thought a lack of resources and staff could stand in the way of a deliberative [public engagement] approach.

Further, there is a lack of standard best practices for authentic and effective public engagement, which leads to a lack of common understanding of what public engagement is and how to approach it. The TIERS Public Engagement Framework and its companion program, the TIERS Learning Lab, provide a step-by-step approach to public engagement.

How Can Your Agency Benefit from Public Engagement?

Local governments will benefit from public engagement in the following ways:

- Improved local agency decision making and actions, with better impacts and outcomes
- More community buy-in and support, with less contentiousness
- Better identification of the public's values, ideas and recommendations
- More informed residents
- More constructive discussion and decision making
- Faster project implementation with less need to revisit again
- More trust in each other and in local government
- Higher rates of community participation and leadership development



THINK



INITIATE

Step 1: Self-Assessment

- Public Engagement Project Assessment
 - Quick Assessment (1-4 hours)
 - Deeper Assessment (8 hours to 6 weeks)
 - *Template Provided*
- Agency Assessment
 - Davenport Institute's "How are WE Doing?" assessment tool

Step 2: Consider Public Engagement Approach

- Draft Public Engagement Approach for your Specific Effort
 - *Template Provided*
- Draft Public Engagement Approach for Agency Wide Application
 - Review your agency's public engagement policies and practices, including current staffing
 - Conduct an analysis of the public engagement functions and needs across your agency

Step 3: Contemplate Community Landscape

- Create or update a list of local community based organizations (CBOs) and others to inform outreach efforts
- Identify diverse locations to hold meetings with target audiences in mind
- *Template Provided*

Step 1: Draft Public Engagement Approach

- Choose a mix of in-person and online activities
- Consider the timeline, budget, staff time implications (your department and other departments as applicable)
- Who will facilitate events? Who/ how will data gathered be input, analyzed, summarized?
- What might go wrong? How might your approach mitigate for challenges?
- *Template Provided*

Step 2: Develop Outreach Plan

- Create an Outreach Plan
 - Consider what you know from your 'community landscape' listing; who you are trying to reach, how much time and money available
- *Template Provided*

Step 3: 'Reality Check'

- Are there local, state or federal laws or regulations you need to consider?
- Are there internal organizational 'politics' or challenges to take into consideration?
- Are there larger 'Political' issues to keep in mind?
 - For example: Is there an upcoming election? A significant recent incident?

*"Society is strongest when we all have a voice.
Engaged communities are often more vibrant
and healthier."*

- The James Irvine Foundation



ENGAGE



REVIEW

Step 1: Implement Outreach Plan

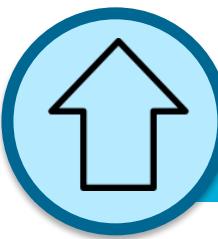
- Implement your plan, prioritizing outreach
- Ensure targeted audiences are represented (authentically) within your plan
 - Double check with local leaders to ensure authentic voices are reached

Step 2: Implement Public Engagement Approach

- Execute your plan; ensure roles are clear; adjust as appropriate
- *Template Provided*

Step 3: ‘Reality Check’

- Are there internal organizational ‘politics’ or challenges that have changed and need to be considered?
- Check in with key community leaders on a regular basis to understand new or coming issues; mitigate accordingly



SHIFT

Step 1: Internal Organizational

- Consider beneficial organizational shifts
 - For example: public engagement assigned within job description(s); commitment to train electeds and staff in public engagement policy and/or skills; ongoing communication strategies that go beyond traditional methods such as ethnic media
 - Send out periodic surveys to understand satisfaction with public engagement related efforts and policies
 - Ask for help when needed from organizations like ILG, Davenport Institute and/or consultants

Step 2: External | Your Community

- Consider beneficial shifts in external relations
 - For example: set and track metrics related to in-person and phone meetings with diverse and underrepresented community members, choose time bound goals; engage with local leadership programs

Step 3: Policy Change

- Consider policy review/ change/ adoption
 - Commitment to review public engagement related policies if they have not been systematically reviewed in the last ten years; Adopt a resolution demonstrating commitment to public engagement

Step 1: Evaluate Public Engagement Approach

- What worked? What could have gone better? See ILG resources like Rapid Review Worksheets
- Is training needed for any staffers in order to execute more effectively in the future? (e.g. facilitation skills; graphic design; survey question construction; meeting design)

Step 2: Evaluate Outreach Plan

- What worked? What could have gone better?
- Is training needed for any staffers in order to execute more effectively in the future? (e.g. challenging people; communications skills; small group facilitation)
- Are there community leaders with whom the agency should build stronger ties?

Step 3: What Barriers Did You Overcome?

- What internal organizational barriers did you overcome?
- What other political barriers did you overcome?

TIERSSM Public Engagement Learning Lab

The TIERS Public Engagement Learning Lab is an interactive, results-oriented 6 month program led by ILG that provides participants in California local government with hands-on instructions, exclusive TIERS public engagement tools, individualized support of your public engagement project, follow up private consulting, and peer-to-peer learning.

Program Benefits + Takeaways:

- 1 Reframe your public engagement from a necessary burden to a beneficial and productive process
- 2 Learn new tactics and tools to manage and respond to diverse viewpoints and navigate contentious stakeholders
- 3 Learn how to drive higher turnout for your big events
- 4 Gain new ideas and digital strategies to move your public engagement ‘Beyond the Usuals’ and reach new residents and stakeholders
- 5 Increase your organization’s internal buy-in for your public engagement work
- 6 Connect with others in your region to share real-world case studies and provide mutual support for successful public engagement work

To learn more about the TIERS Learning Lab and other training opportunities in your region, please contact ILG’s Public Engagement Program at publicengagement@ca-ilg.org

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To access the Institute’s resources on public engagement, visit www.ca-ilg.org/engagement

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The TIERS Framework was developed with a generous grant from The James Irvine Foundation.

Beyond the Usuals

Ideas to Encourage Broader Public Engagement in Community Decision Making

Given the challenges facing cities and counties in California, local officials are increasingly asking residents to participate in public engagement efforts whose outcomes will help shape the future of their communities. These discussions are about land use, budgeting, affordable housing, climate change, transportation, public safety and many other local and regional issues.

However even with the best of intentions to encourage broad participation, local officials often find that only a relatively small number of community members actually take part in public conversations and forums.

A failure to involve a cross-section of residents limits the effectiveness of these public engagement efforts and negatively impacts the breadth and quality of ideas contributed. It can also reduce community support for the final decisions.

Most California communities have diverse populations and some have experienced rapid demographic changes. Residents vary by age, gender, ethnicity, immigrant status and income level. Some own homes and some rent. Community members may be long-time residents or new arrivals. People read and speak English with different degrees of proficiency. Some have disabilities. Individual residents, as well as whole communities, may have more or less experience, confidence, or capacity to participate.

Based on the ideas of many individuals and organizations, and on the experiences of communities throughout California, here are a number of ideas for achieving broader representation in local public engagement efforts.

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Develop Relationships



Build Participation Capacity



Fit Your Process to the Participants



Get Help



Communicate Respectfully



Be Flexible



Have Specific Goals



Stay in Touch



Say Thank You



Keep Learning



DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS

Less engaged communities are often critical of the public engagement process. Developing personal relationships with the community can lead to a more inclusive process and community buy-in.



BUILD COMMUNITY CAPACITY TO PARTICIPATE

Community members have varying degrees of familiarity with local government processes and functions. Providing educational materials or process at the beginning of the public engagement process will allow more meaningful participation from the broad community.



FIT YOUR PROCESS TO THE PARTICIPANTS

Once you determine the *purpose* of a public engagement process, think about the range of *participants* you hope to involve *before* selecting your approach or *process(es)* for that involvement. This will help you create opportunities for participation that will be more appropriate and welcoming for participants and reach the diversity community.



GET HELP

Identify and consult community-based and intermediary organizations, including neighborhood and grassroots leadership groups, local clergy, faith-based organizations, community and ethnic media, and others that can provide two-way conduits for communication between local officials and community residents on specific issues and policies.



COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY AND RESPECTFULLY

Stay current with your communities changing demographics, and develop culturally and linguistically appropriate communications material and strategies. Recognize the importance of communicating with residents in their first language to ensure their maximum understanding of issues. As appropriate, promote public engagement through ethnic media and other intermediary organizations that already serve and work with the communities you wish to reach. Plan ahead for translation services. Transportation assistance and childcare (perhaps through respected intermediary organizations) can often be helpful.



BE FLEXIBLE

Hold public meetings or other public engagement processes in community settings that are known and accessible to the communities you wish to reach. Explore what engagement tools and processes will best meet the needs and conditions of specific populations.



HAVE SPECIFIC GOALS

Take the time to create targeted goals for harder to reach communities. In general, encourage attention and learning about inclusive engagement throughout your agency, and include public information officers in these discussions. Individual departments can develop their own outreach plans to reach specific less-engaged communities or populations.



STAY IN TOUCH

As appropriate, keep current lists of organizations and groups concerned about given issues and keep them informed of opportunities to participate.



SAY THANK YOU & FOLLOW-UP

Express your appreciation for those who do become involved. Let participants know how their input was considered and impacted decisions.



KEEP LEARNING

Follow up after specific engagement efforts to determine what worked and what could be improved.



BUILD IT IN

Explore the integration of diverse community voices as a part of your overall strategy to inform and support the goals and programs of local government.

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Partnering with Community-Based Organizations for More Broad-Based Public Engagement

This publication is for local government officials interested in collaborating with local community-based organizations to enhance the breadth and depth of participation by community residents in local decision-making. Interviews with both local officials and community leaders throughout California were used to generate guidance for those who are getting started or want to enhance their relationships with more of their community.

Why Partner?

Many local officials report that the residents they see participating in their public meetings are a narrow slice of the whole community.¹ To address this challenge, many local agencies use a strategy of nurturing relationships with community-based organizations (CBO) to better reach and engage a broader cross section of residents. The important benefits they cite from these partnerships include the ability to:

- Extend the agency's education and outreach capacities so more residents are aware and informed
- Balance the most involved advocates with perspectives representing more of the community
- Reduce misperceptions and mistrust, and reduce contentiousness
- Identify broader community-based resources and recommendations
- Develop communication channels for keeping people informed over time
- Enhance the cultural competency of engagement plans, and increase the ability to translate issues into relevant questions/framing and accessible language
- Reach people emotionally as well as physically

Local government agencies using this approach have learned that being very intentional about the purposes and parameters of their partnerships can make a dramatic difference in their effectiveness.

Types of Community-Based Organizations

All jurisdictions have non-profit organizations committed to improving the quality of life in their community. Examples include parent-teacher organizations, congregations, sports leagues, adult education programs

¹ 76 percent of city and county officials say that public meetings are dominated by people with narrow agendas. [Testing the Waters](#), May 2013 report with findings from 900 California local officials, available at: www.ca-ilg.org/research-public-engagement-local-government-decision-making. The link has a companion report of research conducted among 500 leaders of civic organizations.

and service clubs such as Rotary or Kiwanis. These kinds of organizations can complement those that may already participate actively in public meetings, such as the chamber of commerce and neighborhood associations.

Partnerships are often sought as a way to elicit unheard perspectives on how an issue or problem is experienced, which can enhance specific policy directions or recommendations. Some agencies have a practice of sharing lists and information about community-based organizations across departments as a way to leverage past investments in these relationships. Instead of developing a new outreach effort and list for each new issue and decision process, they have a ready cross section of the greater community already oriented to some aspect of local decision making. It is also helpful to investigate and acknowledge existing collaborations and networks between organizations to understand how information flows in the community.

Clarifying Purpose and Alignment

The desired demographic and geographic audiences are often the starting point for deciding which community organization(s) will be the most effective partners.

It is also important to identify the purpose and what type of public education and public input is desired. Many officials find this continuum from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) a useful way to summarize different types of engagement:

The best way to determine the right fit is by having an exploratory discussion to assess how the group's focus matches the audiences, topics and activities the local public agency is contemplating for engagement. If after meeting with a community organization, it turns out that there is not an immediate fit for a partnership, valuable information about that part of the community's perspective will still have been gained. At times, it may be important for a period of relationship building, both organizational and personal, to take place before a new partnership is launched. The local agency may financially support some of the staff work or other costs involved in the CBO's partnership activities. If a grant is sought to help pay for the outreach and engagement efforts, the CBO should be involved in the planning and budgeting for its activities.



Inform Consult Involve Collaborate Empower

Sample Roles in a Partnership

The Community-Based Organization: Help get desired sector(s) of the community to attend and actively participate in community conversations, possibly serving as a co-hosting partner.

The Local Government Agency: Design public conversations in such a way that the invited input is meaningful and will be used in decision-making.

Together: Ensure that communications, information and accommodations support the intended audience and that outcomes are shared with the community.

Types of Partnerships

Planning departments, health and human service departments, metropolitan planning organizations, public information officers and many other local agency offices are employing CBO partnerships. Frequently, local agency staff have limited time to be present in multiple communities

often enough to build the kind of rapport that invites engagement, so they connect and partner with a range of CBOs in various ways. Common examples of CBO partner tasks include:

- Expand awareness of upcoming public engagement processes
- Co-host public input sessions in locations more familiar to community members
- Help agency staff understand the community's current level of understanding about an issue so materials can provide helpful background context
- Help adapt information about the issue into language and a format that make sense to nontechnical experts and people with varying levels of education
- Translate information and provide bilingual facilitation if appropriate
- Recruit attendees and provide any needed support such as transportation and child care
- Help with reporting back to the community about how their input was used in the final decision and ways that they can stay involved and informed

Depending on the extent of the work involved, many agencies provide some kind of compensation to the community organization for their efforts. Sometimes a local community foundation or other funder may help underwrite such costs.

Creating the Right Conditions

When forming a working partnership, as with developing any relationship, no single “formula” exists for developing effective plans, communications and trust. Instead, both local officials and community leaders shared that the following conditions were an important starting point:

- There is adequate advance dialogue between the agency and the CBO to determine the *mutual* interests of the partnership. The desired community engagement needs to be positioned so that it aligns with the community organization's as well the local agency's priorities.
- The local government agency's decision-makers are on board and committed to the intended outcome of the partnership. They are making an authentic request for community input that will be seriously considered in the decision-making process.
- The partnership is based on mutual respect for what each party brings. For example, the CBO can provide insight into which attitudinal barriers different sectors of the community may have about interacting with local government. If there is a history of mistrust, it helps to bring it out in the open.
- The local agency and CBO(s) have clearly defined roles and expectations for each other.
- The agency is prepared to support the information and communication needs of the broader cross section of the public who tend to know far less than more experienced advocates and local government enthusiasts.

“Are you thinking about these community groups as constituents to be managed or placated — or as genuine partners collaborating with you on a shared goal of expanding participation?” — City official

Local officials' experience suggests that the most effective partnerships were used for the whole decision-making cycle: the front-end public introduction of the issue, the community input and dialogue, and the reporting out of how public input was used in the final decision. Another helpful practice when entering into the relationship with the CBO is to set up periodic checkpoints to review milestones and correct

course on the outreach as needed. Include an explicit debrief of what worked well and what can be improved for the next time. In summary, local officials and CBO leaders should honestly share their respective goals and needs and then work out a mutually accepted plan for tasks and task completion, for meetings and other communications, for CBO partner compensation (where appropriate), for how decisions will be made in relationship to shared work, and whether and how they plan to assess the work done once completed.

“I get a call asking: ‘Can you get 50 parents to the meeting?’

First I want to talk about what people in the community care about.”

— Leader of a large nonprofit organization

Navigating Around Common Pitfalls

Partnerships tend to work well if they are based on mutual goals, clear communication and trusting relationships. But many times the partnership between a local agency and community-based organizations hits trouble spots. Here are some of the most commonly reported pitfalls and helpful practices to enhance the likelihood of success.

| Common Pitfalls | Helpful Practices |
|---|---|
| Treating the CBO as a “supplier” for one-way communication to the community, especially to enlist support for an existing recommendation. | Develop processes for two-way communications about mutually defined concerns — without assuming what the final policy recommendation will be. |
| Unrealistic expectations for the CBO partner — not enough time or resources allocated for robust engagement. | Start early, establish shared understanding about what is feasible, and consider using a network of multiple CBOs. |
| Selecting organizations that already have a fixed point of view that limits discovery of common ground. | Look beyond the most visible groups engaged in public dialogue, and find those interested in general quality of life in the community. |
| The recruitment worked but the meeting process and/or information did not match the audience. | Partner with the CBOs to develop materials and questions that make sense to the broader community. |
| There is a perception that decision-makers do not treat the new community voices brought in through the partnership with equal respect. | Involve decision-makers in the goals for the community engagement and what kinds of input they will be receiving and can listen for. |
| Partnership agreement is too vague. It's unclear who has responsibility for which part of the process. | Create an explicit set of responsibilities for the CBO and the local public agency, and revisit as needed. |
| The community feels “used” spending time providing input with no information about outcome. | Explain decisions and next steps. Continue to invest in opportunities for two-way communication. |

Busy local officials are often encouraged to focus their activities on concrete short-term deliverables with high likelihood for success. Because it takes time to nurture and sustain partnerships with community organizations, some tend to make this practice a lower priority. Others may have had past experiences where some aspects of the partnership worked well but other aspects did not, and they are reluctant to re-engage in something that was not an unqualified success. However, elected local officials and staff may choose to recognize the longer-term value of such partnerships and the more informed, inclusive decision-making — and public trust — that can result from these efforts. They can embrace a learning-oriented mindset and work with community partners to reflect on and improve public engagement processes.

Resources to Learn More

Why Engage the Public? - www.ca-ilg.org/document/why-engage-public

Beyond the Usuals - www.ca-ilg.org/BeyondUsuals

Expand Your Community Connections - www.ca-ilg.org/expanding-your-agencys-community-networks

Planning Public Engagement: Key Questions for Local Officials -
www.cailg.org/PublicEngagementKeyQuestions

Clergy and Congregations - www.ca-ilg.org/document/local-officials-guide-working-clergy-and-congregations

Immigrant Engagement Guide - www.ca-ilg.org/local-officials-guide-immigrant-civic-engagement

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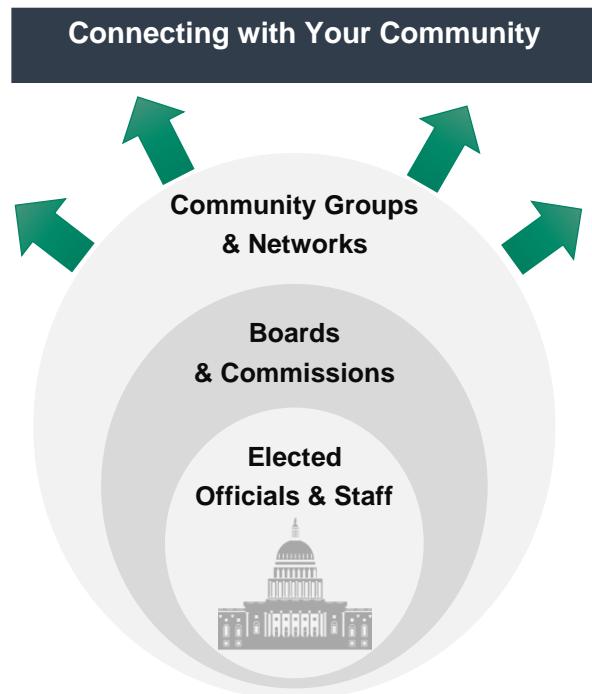
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Expand Your Agency's Community Connections

Many public officials have a wide variety of relationships in their communities, often related to specific projects and initiatives. Examples include interactions with schools, groups serving specific populations, business associations, faith-based organizations and more. Yet these groups and networks may not come to mind when an agency is planning and announcing public meetings.

Use the following list to identify different partners, network contacts and “key connectors” in your agency’s jurisdiction. The next time the agency wants to reach out beyond the small slice of the public that most frequently attends public meetings, consider reaching out to the community through some of the types of organizations listed here. Add these contacts to the agency’s outreach list, so this wider range of contacts is ready whenever needed.



Groups Close to Local Government Decision-Making and Operations

- Board and commission members in the jurisdiction
- Past and present members of community task forces and working groups
- Public agency-sponsored citizen academies and resident leadership programs
- Local multi-sector leadership groups and business roundtables
- Advocates and service providers whose work relates to the issue under review

Networks Where Community Members Affiliate by Interest

- Parent-teacher associations/organizations, school support organizations
- Youth: groups not tied to schools (Boys' and Girls' Clubs, youth sports leagues, scouts, YMCA, youth centers, etc.); parent groups/mother's clubs
- Business: chambers of commerce, ethnic chambers; small business associations and incubators
- Labor associations
- Community-oriented and ethnic media
- Internet-based groups and blogs
- Neighborhood organizations and homeowners' associations
- Civic membership groups: Rotary, Elks, Kiwanis, etc.
- Friends of the Library
- Good government groups, League of Women Voters
- Adult education: community colleges, adult schools, English as a second language programs
- Safety: Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), Neighborhood Watch
- Community health and wellness groups
- Sports leagues
- Seniors' groups
- Early childhood groups: First 5 Commission, child care councils
- Social equity/social justice
- Environmental groups and outdoor recreation
- Arts groups: music, visual, dance, theater, ethnic culture

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