



INCLUSIVE
INVESTMENT STARTS
WITH EQUITABLE
COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT



SPARCC

Strong, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities Challenge

An initiative of Enterprise Community Partners, the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, the Low Income Investment Fund, and the Natural Resources Defense Council

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“ Community engagement alone is not enough. It needs to be equitable. For engagement to be equitable, it must aim for participation from a group representative of a community’s geography, race/ethnicity, age, gender, and other demographic characteristics. It must place specific emphasis on those who will be most adversely impacted by the project and those who are most often marginalized in these conversations. Equitable community engagement starts by recognizing the reality that systemic barriers cause certain populations to have less access to city processes. To overcome those barriers, the City must invest engagement resources towards the people who are often underrepresented in participation. ”

– City of Durham, N.C., Equitable Development Blueprint¹

Introduction

[The Strong, Prosperous, And Resilient Communities Challenge \(SPARCC\)](#) is a multi-year initiative investing in and amplifying local efforts underway in six regions to ensure that new investments reduce racial disparities, build a culture of health, and prepare for a changing climate. The initiative’s long-term goal is to change the way metropolitan regions grow, invest, and build through integrated, cross-sector approaches that benefit low-income people and communities of color. SPARCC offers flexible grant funding, technical assistance, and a learning network to support innovative solutions that advance racial equity, health, and climate resilience. SPARCC favors a new chapter in community development -- one that is centered on “inclusive investment” that prioritizes a more equitable and healthy future for everyone. Inclusive investment is defined as community-centered investments in the built environment for communities traditionally underserved or for which investment has been largely extractive and has not benefited existing residents.

SPARCC’s Principles of Inclusive Development include:

- Prioritizing processes and outcomes on racial inclusion, deciphering the power dynamics of who benefits, who pays, and who decides.

¹ For more information see:

https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/durhamnis/pages/592/attachments/original/1543332399/Draft_Equitable_Engagement_Blueprint_%2818%29_11.06.pdf?1543332399

- Utilizing multiple tools and strategies that cut across capital, community engagement, local leadership development, data analysis, and policy change.
- Elevating integrated approaches that result in improved racial, health, and climate outcomes rather than those that focus solely on the fiscal bottom line or financial return on investment.
- Recognizing that investment processes and social systems are inherently interconnected and that cross-sector approaches are necessary to achieve systems change.

Central to practicing and realizing inclusive investment are processes that engage community members directly in the planning, design, resource prioritization and implementation of investment systems. In practice, this means partnerships between investors and community-based organizations or individuals, including those who can serve as facilitators, community advisers or liaisons, engagement collaborators and empowered stakeholders.

Community engagement exists on a spectrum, and not all projects or processes require the same level of involvement. Figure 1, adapted from IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum, shows the range of ways that community members can be involved in decision-making. SPARCC believes that engagement processes centered on collaboration and community empowerment or power-sharing yield better results for all stakeholders, including public agencies.

The Spectrum of Community Engagement

INCREASING IMPACT ON DECISION-MAKING				
INFORMING	CONSULTING	INVOLVING	COLLABORATING	EMPOWERING
Providing balanced and objective information about new programs or services, and about the reasons for choosing them. Providing updates during implementation.	Inviting feedback on alternatives, analyses, and decisions related to new programs or services. Letting people know how their feedback has influenced program decisions.	Working with community members to ensure that their aspirations and concerns are considered at every stage of planning and decision-making. Letting people know how their involvement has influenced program decisions.	Enabling community members to participate in every aspect of planning and decision-making for new programs or services.	Giving community members sole decision-making authority over new programs or services, and allowing professionals to serve only in consultative and supportive roles.

Figure 1. Understanding the Community Engagement Spectrum. Source: IAP2, cited in *Elevated Chicago Equitable Community Engagement Principles*, 2019)

This SPARCC report offers a set of lessons learned and specific strategies that public agencies can deploy to engage traditionally underrepresented community members as partners to shape community development policies and investments. It also contains ideas for community organizations to pursue with public agencies or other local partners

to ensure that the people most impacted by community development decisions can lead or have a substantive role in those decisions.

Public planning processes have evolved in recent years from being a one-time, mostly one-way effort to inform the community about a proposed investment or policy change, i.e., a new highway project or a zoning change, to more community involvement to shape and design projects and policies.

Equitable community engagement practices can take this even further to create deeper two-way learning and conversation between public agencies and community representatives.

This can take many forms, including:

- Investing in community engagement with financial resources, i.e., dedicating a portion of the overall project budget to community engagement activities; budgeting for food, childcare, transportation reimbursements, etc., to facilitate broader involvement.
- Training public agency staff in cultural competency and other engagement strategies such as conflict negotiation.
- Cross-departmental engagement coordination.
- Compensating residents for their time and expertise through gift cards, stipends or other monetary methods.
- Providing learning opportunities for residents on specific issue areas with the goal of having residents become decision-making partners.
- Compensating community groups for their time, networks, and partnership through financial resources.
- Adopting principles at a city or agency level to communicate engagement values both to the public and to agency staff.

Moving from informing community to creating community agency requires a shift in government staff, processes and budgets. When considering community engagement, consider what community members do best for themselves and each other. Ask what community members can do best if they receive support from organizations including public agencies. Ask what organizations or government can do best for communities that people can't do for themselves.



The Oakland chapter of ACCE promoting community empowerment as an anti-displacement strategy

How Equitable Engagement Practices Lead to Better Outcomes

The nature and effectiveness of community engagement is shifting, both along a spectrum of community impact on decision making, but also as a result of external factors ranging from the national political climate to available technology, to trust in the process, and preferred methods for engaging in community issues. Public agencies are discovering that community engagement methods that worked in the past are no longer appropriate today. A public hearing is insufficient for engaging and informing a diverse range of community stakeholders.

Committing necessary resources and articulating a commitment to equitable community engagement principles and practices can help government build trust with communities, leading to quicker and less contentious (or litigious) processes. Some communities inherently distrust government based on decades of discrimination, exclusion, and segregation. Where trust is absent, a mix of fear, skepticism, disbelief of facts and data, misinformation, and a belief that outcomes are predetermined can severely undermine projects.

The use of community-based organizations to facilitate and mediate community engagement can increase trust in the process, particularly in instances where the community debate has the potential to become intractably polarized and hardened. Communities of color have made clear they value racial diversity among government and other stakeholders, and a lack of it can be a barrier to trust. Infrastructure plans and projects that enlist lawyers, developers, engineers or other experts too often use technical knowledge, creating more barriers, or supersede community-based knowledge and lived experiences.

Getting out in front of change with a community-centered planning process allows the public, the development community, and government partners to define expectations and requirements ahead of time. Resourcing community-based organizations and

utilizing partnership approaches allows for deeper and more authentic community trust-building and can help take the burden off the public sector.

Equitable community engagement can:²

- *Increase the likelihood that projects or solutions will be widely accepted. Individuals who participate in these processes show significant commitment to help make the projects happen.*
- *Create more effective and equitable solutions. Drawing on local knowledge from a diverse group creates solutions that are practical and effective.*
- *Improve local knowledge and skills in problem-solving. Participants learn about the issues in-depth. Greater knowledge allows them to see multiple sides of the problem. Individuals can practice communication and decision-making skills.*
- *Build shared power and integrate individuals from different backgrounds. Groups that feel ignored can gain greater control over their lives and their community. When those from different areas of the community work together, they often find they have much in common.*
- *Create local networks of community members. The more people who know what is happening and who are willing to work toward a goal, the more likely a community is to be successful in reaching its goals.*
- *Create several opportunities for discussing concerns. Regular, ongoing discussions allow people to express concerns before problems become too big or out of control.*
- *Increase trust in community organizations and governance. Working together improves communication and understanding. Knowing what government, community members and leaders, and organizations can and cannot do may reduce future conflict.*

What We Have Learned

1. Work with collaborative tables to reduce community conflict and expand reach

In each of SPARCC's six regions, cross-sector collaborative tables are working to deepen engagement within community, and with public and private sector partners. Time, effort, resources and trust among partners is needed to sustain collaborative work, which often includes public sector agencies

² Allan Bassler, Kathy Brasier, Neal Fogle, and Ron Taverno Pennsylvania State University Cooperative Extension (April 2008) http://www.rural.palegislature.us/Effective_Citizen_Engagement.pdf

Public sector agencies join collaborative efforts for many reasons, but among them is the opportunity to build deeper relationships with community partners that can yield long-term dividends. Investments in the built environment have lasting impact on a broad range of outcomes from life expectancy and health to educational attainment, crime rates, and climate impacts, to name a few. The desire to expedite project delivery and produce projects on time and under budget is strong, especially among elected officials, developers, and engineers. In the rush to move projects, community engagement may be sacrificed, yet rushing or short-changing community engagement may in the long-run increase project cost and may even result in such strong community opposition that the project is canceled altogether. In short, community engagement matters. Cross-sector tables comprised of partners representing a range of community voices and stakeholder interests can inform and shape planning, investment and policy decisions advanced by public agencies.

In Chicago and Atlanta, for example, collaborative tables include public sector partners such as the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA), Atlanta Regional Commission, and the Chicago Department of Public Health.

In Atlanta, the Transformation Alliance (TFA) began as an equitable transit-oriented development collaborative with MARTA and the Atlanta Regional Commission helping to convene and staff the effort to build stronger working relationships between community development and public sector partners. This evolved into TFA collaborating with additional partners with strong neighborhood roots, an emphasis on racial equity and community advocacy skills. At times the collaborative helps to lead and support community engagement activities, and in other instances individual members take on the leadership and engagement work directly.



*"Catalyzing Community Inclusion & Leadership"
SPARCC Learning Convening in Minneapolis, May 2019*

For example, a \$125,000 SPARCC Capital Grant supported an investment in Soccer in the Streets that led to two Station Soccer fields at transit stations – a transformational approach that creates social cohesion, promotes good health through exercise,

enhances climate resilience and brings jobs to those in the neighborhood. The fields have become the proverbial “third space” where people gather, parents talk, kids play, and community is built. Both the Soccer in the Streets process and the resulting community space utilized community-led engagement strategies that now create continuous opportunities for residents to influence how these stations are used and how to meet other community needs in ways that MARTA, the Atlanta Regional Commission, TFA and other regional partners can support.

As a result, public agencies benefit from greater community engagement and increased local leadership, ownership and support for public sector investments and programs. When community engagement is led and managed by trusted community organizations and members of the collaborative, support is often stronger. Because of familiarity and trust, community partners can typically engage with community residents directly and in a more sustained manner than a public agency.

In Oakland, CA, for instance, public agencies are exploring strategies for more authentic community partnership. The City is working with regional advocacy partners including non-profit groups like TransForm to develop and refine city programs. Through City funding, TransForm is working with other local advocacy groups that have deep community ties to revise the ways that transportation planning decisions engage community members by calling out what has worked and hasn’t in planning for new mobility options like bike sharing.

“When community engagement is the last step in program development, the community has actually been shut out of the design process. This defeats the purpose of community engagement. It was actually disempowering for residents to be made aware of new programs and asked their opinions, only to learn that the decisions had already been made and the programs would not be easily accessible to them.”

– TransForm³

The City of Oakland has created a Department of Race and Equity to promote full inclusion of all residents of the City.⁴ The Department is working with other City agencies to train staff on pro-equity engagement tools and strategies that build upon findings that TransForm and local community-based organizations have raised to

³ http://www.transformca.org/sites/default/files/OakMob_FINAL.pdf

⁴ <https://www.oaklandca.gov/resources/race-matters>

encourage more involvement of those who are most impacted by public investments and city policies.

2. Explicitly respect and value local knowledge and community expertise

“ We must collectively respect each other in terms of our place within the decision-making dynamic, our power, our viewpoints our life experiences, our privilege and our relationship to the communities in which we live, work and play. ”

– Elevated Chicago⁵

SPARCC’s regional partners are using grants, technical assistance and leadership academies that put community members in the driver’s seat. Supporting residents to directly design and deploy engagement processes with their community peers, with the public sector, and with private developers taps local knowledge and builds deeper community expertise. This approach is centered on building trust and deploying partnerships.

In early 2019, Elevated Chicago, a partnership of 17 organizations committed to transforming the half-mile radius around transit stations into hubs of opportunity and connection across the region’s vast transit system, released eight principles and a powerful set of recommendations to inform equitable engagement practices designed to foster community ownership in decision-making processes. These have been adopted by Mayor Lightfoot’s Office of Community Engagement to guide the ways that city agencies work with community.

Elevated Chicago’s eight principles for equitable community engagement⁶ are:

1. **Shift our mindset:**
 - See value in all voices
 - Redefine “community”
 - Rebuild trust
 - Foster collective learning
 - Take time and be action-oriented
2. **Co-design community engagement with community:** Consider power dynamics, language, and formats.
3. **Enable two-way communication and learning:** Show up, listen and create feedback loops; be clear about expectations.

⁵Elevated Chicago Community Engagement Principles and Recommendations (2019)

<http://www.elevatedchicago.org/engage/>

⁶<http://www.elevatedchicago.org/engage/>

4. **Promote cultural competency and empathy:** Meet people where they are and be aware of where you are; demonstrate respect.
5. **Value community knowledge and capital:** Seek local knowledge; compensate; redefine and amplify capital; recruit and procure locally.
6. **Seek and embrace multiple viewpoints:** Be welcoming; reach out to the unusual suspects; avoid group think; embrace creative tension.
7. **Cultivate leadership and advocacy:** Build up agency in the social infrastructure and leadership of the community; do no harm; improve collaborative capacity.
8. **Foster ownership and identity in community:** Celebrate community identity; demonstrate value of permanent community assets, such as transit; build ownership beyond the conceptual sense of the word “ownership; build local financial ownership over community assets.

Elevated Chicago is advocating for greater adoption of these principles by public agencies, and the collaborative is putting these principles into practice within its own work.

In Atlanta, community-based organizations, city staff and service providers worked collectively to create the “Atlanta Community Engagement Playbook⁷” and a set of training resources to support service providers and help community organizations design and lead collaborative engagement efforts. This step-by-step resource offers a set of actionable practices and checklists that can be used to create more open, inclusive and fun engagement practices. Inclusive engagement and valuing community voice is essential to demonstrating a “New Atlanta Way” – a twist on a city saying – in which investments in communities are not done to them, but with them.

Engagement reaches beyond traditional players and voices, recognizing that community expertise has no age restrictions. The TFA in Atlanta, for instance, recently launched a Youth Academy for kids aged 13-17.⁸ This week-long program matches students with practitioners to build a foundation of planning concepts, gain a historical perspective on structural racism and its impacts on development patterns, and better understand the intersecting ways that race, transit, climate, and health affect residents’ daily lives. The Academy also teaches youth leadership skills to engage, organize, and mobilize residents. Students are provided lunch and a modest daily stipend to help ensure that wealth is not a barrier to participation and to value their time to learn skills that benefit the larger community and public discourse.

Statewide efforts can also be rooted in community voice. In California, the state legislature passed SB 2722 in 2016 that established the Transformative Climate Communities (TCC) program. TCC is awarded in the form of large grants to community-

⁷ <http://ourcommunity.is/engaged/action-guides/>

⁸ <https://atltransformationalliance.org/about/announcements/>

based organizations, local agencies and others to develop and implement neighborhood-level climate sustainability plans. Direct and extensive community engagement is a key element of TCC. To be considered for funding, all applications must include multi-stakeholder collaborations and strategies for community engagement tied to decision making.

TCC was created to empower communities most impacted by pollution to choose their own goals, strategies, and projects to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve air quality. TCC prioritizes community voices as it provides a platform for community empowerment that is turned into community-led projects, creating more healthy and vibrant communities.⁹

3. Commit resources for community expertise

Putting community at the center of investments requires that those who often control resources and planning processes – government agencies, community development organizations, developers and philanthropy – let go of some traditional reins of power. Resourcing and recognizing residents as partners in the process can achieve better results not only for the short-term but also to build longer-term trust and community capacity. Equitable community engagement respects community voice, recognizing residents as local experts who understand the unique assets, dynamics and needs of their neighborhoods and cities.

Partnership can take many forms, including:

- Committing adequate financial resources to authentically engage the community in a sustained manner.
- Devoting adequate staff resources to liaison with community leaders and members, navigate government processes and prioritize the needs of traditionally underserved residents and neighborhoods.
- Training staff to increase cultural competency.
- Creating metrics and new methods to engage historically under-represented voices like youth, immigrants, or people with disabilities.
- Building shared strategies with community-led organizations to lead engagement processes and invest in local leadership development.

When identifying groups with which to work and engage, it is important to encourage participation of populations most likely to be adversely impacted or those populations historically underrepresented in planning processes. Partner organizations should be rooted in the community and their membership and staff should be representative and comprised of the racial and socio-economic class of residents. Ideally, these community

⁹ <https://calgreenzones.org/a-community-led-vision-for-transformative-climate-communities/>

partners should be involved in co-designing engagement early in the process and before key decisions have been made.

Currently, there is no standard practice or benchmark to determine what amount or percentage of resources should be committed to community engagement as part of determining project budgets. One reason is that the process varies based on the context of each place and project. A range of approaches and accounting methods exists, such as allocating resources from staffing budgets, adding community engagement line items, setting a percentage of the total project budget for ongoing community engagement, and grants. SPARCC believes it is critical that resources be identified in a transparent manner specifically indicated to support engagement. In designing Requests for Proposals (RFP) for engagement, public agencies should include language that makes it clear to those who may respond that local community knowledge is valued or required.



Stakeholder meeting in Newark, NJ

In one example, Los Angeles, where voters in recent years have approved several major funding measures for parks, open space and transit expansion, SPARCC partners have successfully advocated to include specific provisions to fund and adopt community engagement practices and have provided trainings and workshops to support the practice.

Under ACT LA, the collaborative seeks to:

Ensure that stakeholders across a broad spectrum, including those that are harder to reach through traditional outreach strategies, are meaningfully engaged in the planning, funding and delivery of Metro's transit system. Require station area planning processes

funded by Metro through grants and vending contracts to contract with local community-based organization to lead creative participatory planning exercises in order to meaningfully incorporate community input and build community ownership. Local CBOs should have demonstrated specialized knowledge and trusted relationships with communities around the station area. Planning should incorporate historical, social and cultural contexts of the station area and include discussion about and community-supported solutions and resources to prevent commercial and residential displacement. CBOs should be funded sufficiently and be included early in the budget planning discussion. – ACT LA

In the City of Minneapolis, officials created an Office of Neighborhood and Community Relations (NCR) to help coordinate engagement work across city departments and build community liaison relationships as a way to implement the city’s “Blueprint for Equitable Engagement.”¹⁰ For 2019, the NCR budget is \$11.9 million, which is funded primarily through the NCR Special Revenue Fund.

Likewise, King County, Washington, has adopted several strategies to elevate racial equity within its climate, public health and economic development work. This includes its Communities of Opportunity program, which is centered on community-driven partnerships.¹¹ This approach commits the County to planning and engagement efforts that tap into existing community expertise and leadership and strengthen community capacity.

Through this work, the County seeks to change the traditional systems by which community and institutions, including but not limited to government, engage with one another to make decisions on investments and policies. This includes directly resourcing community-based groups for their local knowledge and involvement. Over \$3 million was provided in 2018 to tap the collective power of residents to improve health and well-being through leadership development, collaborative tables, and developing community-based program models.¹²

¹⁰ For more information see: City of Minneapolis (2016). Blueprint for Equitable Engagement.

<http://www.minneapolismn.gov/www/groups/public/@ncr/documents/webcontent/wcmsp-187047.pdf>

¹¹ Information on King County’s Communities of Opportunity <https://www.coopartnerships.org/>

¹² <https://www.coopartnerships.org/blog/2018/4/10/communities-of-opportunity-expands-investments-to-increase-civic-engagement-and-strengthen-connections>

INSIDER TIP: A variety of approaches are being utilized by public agencies to fund community engagement. These reflect the different funding sources and their eligibility, procurement regulations, and local capacity challenges including the fact that many non-profit community-based organizations are not set up to administer the robust requirements of receiving and reporting public funds.

Among the key takeaways: Local, state and federal funding programs and contracts typically involve different regulatory and reporting requirements that can be burdensome for small, non-profits to meet. Eligibility restrictions may also create hurdles. Smaller community-based groups do not typically have the infrastructure to establish billing and overhead rates or meet insurance and liability requirements typical in public contracting. Responding to public procurements is a competitive and complex process. Public contracts are usually done as reimbursements and can take time to process, which creates excessive delays in payments, placing a financial burden on smaller non-profits with tight cash-flow.

To overcome these challenges, some city departments issue contracts to intermediary entities such as regional non-profits that have the administrative capacity to manage these requirements and then subcontract or pass through community engagement funding to smaller local organizations. Writing RFPs and contracts to specifically support and prioritize engagement of local organizations with community knowledge facilitates this approach.

Some public agencies also have restrictions on paying individuals directly for their time and service. Contracting with vendors that provide gift cards or other ways to compensate individuals can overcome this hurdle. Contracts can also be written with appropriate titles given to “advisers” or “community experts” to meet legal requirements while prohibiting cronyism.

4. Design and fund engagement activities appropriate to the need

Often in public participation efforts, considerable focus is put on getting as many people to participate as possible. This is a worthy goal, and a variety of techniques are required to achieve it. Yet, much can also be learned from better understanding why people may not be participating in outreach efforts. Practitioners at [Groundwork USA](#) have found these commonly cited reasons hindering community participation:

- Lack of knowledge of the political system
- Previous negative community engagement experience
- Economic barriers; needing to focus on basic needs of self and family
- Not seeing one’s own culture or identity reflected in meeting format or content
- Fear of being judged, and feeling emotionally unsafe, or unwelcome

- Transportation barriers
- Childcare needs
- Spiritual beliefs and practices
- Immigration status
- Meeting time or date does not consider work schedules, religious holidays, mealtimes, or other family needs
- Historical patterns of municipal decisions do not reflect community input; broken promises made by political candidates, or both, resulting in reinforced distrust of government and institutions

The last of these is significant. Engagement activities carried out without a commitment to act upon findings, or those viewed as merely perfunctory, can do more harm than good. There is also the real problem of too much engagement activity. This is especially true when engagement is not well coordinated across initiatives or government agencies, and “consultation fatigue” sets in as residents are asked to take part in a plethora of forums, meetings, and activities. Engagement can cease to be meaningful if it is undertaken purely for the sake of meeting a requirement or reaching a numerical target.

In King County, Washington, county leaders created a Community Engagement Continuum¹³ that provides details, characteristics and strategies for five levels of community engagement. The continuum shows a range of actions from county-led information-sharing that includes shorter-term to longer-term community-led activities. The continuum is used for simple and complex efforts. As a project develops, the level of community engagement may change, but it is clearly articulated and coordinated with community partners. The level of engagement depends on various factors, including program goals, time constraints, program and community readiness, capacity and resources. King County created a Community Engagement Guide and worksheet that translates the engagement continuum into specific applications within the County’s work and departments. Staff are trained and directed on how to use the guide in the initial planning stages of a public project.¹⁴

King County’s Community Engagement Guide builds upon the County’s Equity Impact Review (EIR) process that has been in use for several years and merges empirical (quantitative) data with community engagement findings (qualitative) to inform planning, decision-making and implementation of actions that affect equity in King County.¹⁵ This

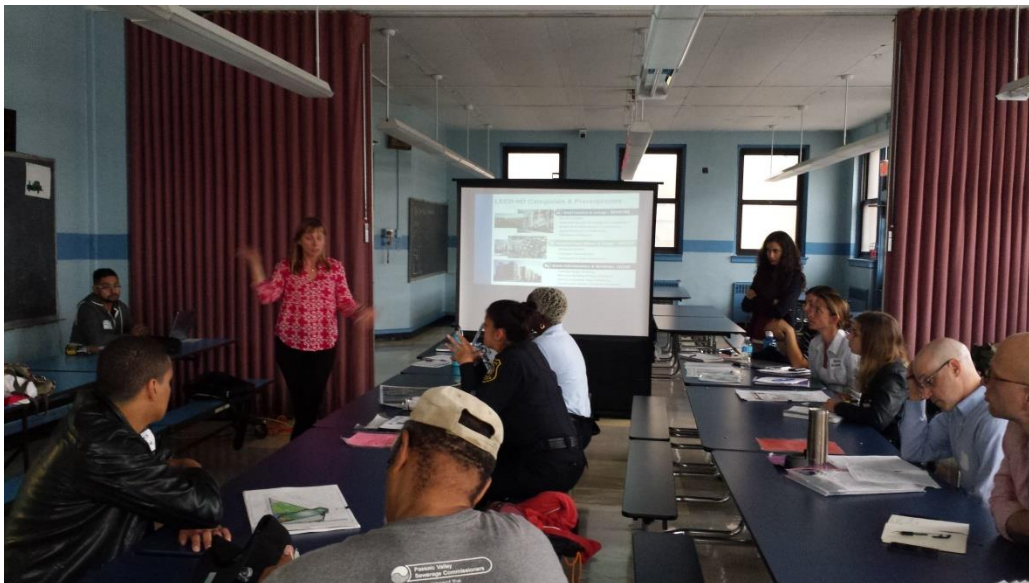
¹³ <https://www.kingcounty.gov/~media/elected/executive/equity-social-justice/documents/CommunityEngagementGuideContinuum2011.ashx?la=en>

¹⁴ <https://kingcounty.gov/elected/executive/equity-social-justice/tools-resources.aspx>

¹⁵ https://kingcounty.gov/~media/elected/executive/equity-social-justice/2016/The_Equity_Impact_Review_checklist_Mar2016.ashx?la=en

process has resulted in concrete equity actions embedded into how infrastructure projects are planned and designed. For instance, the County's green building policy – applicable to all capital projects regardless of which green building rating system is used – includes equity and social justice factors that can be integrated into capital projects.¹⁶

Another effective strategy is creating local leadership and training academies. Many communities have adapted the Board and Commissions Leadership Institute curriculum created by Urban Habitat, a Bay Area advocacy organization.¹⁷ In Los Angeles, SPARCC partners are training tenants, affordable housing champions and transit justice advocates on ways to meaningfully engage in the process to update 35 community plans across the city. ACT-LA created *Planning for an Equitable Los Angeles: A Guide to Shaping LA's New Community Plans*, a toolkit and website with resources for residents and community groups that want to participate in their community plan update. The toolkit provides a guide to LA's community planning process, a case study on the community-led People's Plan for South and Southeast LA neighborhoods, and 60 policy tools for advancing equitable development, addressing growth and preservation of affordable housing; community health and environmental justice; inclusive economic development that supports local workers and businesses; livable, publicly accessible, walkable, and bikeable public areas; and community leadership and authentic engagement.¹⁸



Ironbound Community Corporation Meeting in Newark, NJ

¹⁶ https://kingcounty.gov/~media/elected/executive/equity-social-justice/2016/The_Equity_Impact_Review_checklist_Mar2016.ashx?la=en

¹⁷ <https://urbanhabitat.org/leadership/board-and-commissions-leadership-institute-leadership-curriculum>

¹⁸ <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a023c3eccc5c5b5b6d659c9/t/5acaf8b7aa4a998f3f642a71/1523251416377/ACTLA-CPT-FINAL.pdf>

5. Measure what matters

Equitable community engagement is an emerging practice. We need to better understand and quantify the benefits of deeper, more intentional partnership. Co-designing benchmarks with community partners to track progress and impact is essential. This can include metrics that capture benefits to the public sector such as stronger project support, time or cost efficiencies of projects or plan implementation, or increased diversity and engagement by specific stakeholders. For the community it may include greater community leadership development, increased representation on boards or commissions, and projects or plans that include specific community-identified goals.

Feedback loops are essential to ensuring that people's voices matter. Transparency is essential in articulating and demonstrating the ways that community input is considered and how it impacts decision-making. Increasingly local governments are using community engagement indicators.

The “Equitable Development Blueprint¹⁹” of the City of Durham, N.C., for example, prescribes intentional engagement methodologies and procedures to ensure historically underrepresented communities are included in the City’s planning and decision-making processes. The Blueprint includes goals to measure equitable engagement, minimize adverse effects and maximize the benefits of public projects and processes for low-wealth communities and communities of color. It identifies the key components of an equitable engagement plan and offers strategies and tools to guide City efforts.

Oakland, CA’s Department of Race and Equity is tasked with promoting greater inclusion and full participation of residents in government planning and decision-making. As part of this work, the City created an Equity Indicators framework by which all City programs are considered. These indicators provide a baseline quantitative framework used by City staff and community members to better understand the impacts of race as they consider policies and investments. Oakland’s Equity Indicators are available to the public to fully explore.²⁰

In the City of Minneapolis, the Office of Neighborhood and Community Relations supports a data-driven approach to help set benchmarks and track performance in reaching historically underrepresented groups and key communities, including people with disabilities. Progress is tracked by comparing eight diversity factors with success – defined as the collective results being within 80% of the citywide demographic

¹⁹ For more information see:

https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/durhamnis/pages/592/attachments/original/1543332399/Draft_Equitable_Engagement_Blueprint_%2818%29_11.06.pdf?1543332399

²⁰ <https://data.oaklandnet.com/stories/s/Oakland-Equity-Indicators/brb2-j4ad/>

benchmark. The City administers a voluntary Boards and Commissions Diversity Survey and a Neighborhood Board Survey to collect this information. Different funding sources exist to support community partnership and expand outreach; and resources are also devoted to training staff on innovative engagement techniques, cultural competency, and strategies for community dialogue. Cultural engagement is recognized as being as equally important as neighborhood engagement.

Conclusion

Equitable community engagement is foundational to achieving inclusive investments that foster equitable development by and with the people directly impacted. Public agencies, non-profit community organizations, service providers and developers can all take actions and commit resources to collectively build and deploy engagement strategies that give people a voice and a seat at the decision-making table. Community engagement does not end when a project is built, or a plan is adopted. It is a long-term commitment to building respect, trust and ownership between engagement partners.

Adoption of community engagement policies and blueprints created in partnership with the community demonstrate commitment to upholding community insights, valuing local knowledge and building lasting community leadership. This work requires that leaders dedicate appropriate resources to staff engagement and pay community-based organizations and residents for their expertise; alter traditional planning processes and procurement methods to elevate equitable implementation; create the flexibility needed to resource local partners; and work creatively by embedding elements of arts, culture, and personality into this work.

Public agencies and local organizations should invest in leadership and training to build greater cultural competency and develop new skills to more meaningfully engage on equity-centered work and cross-sector inclusive investment approaches. They should also work across the community engagement spectrum with the goal to create more representation and participation by people who are most impacted. Equitable community engagement requires transformation of traditional public participation processes with results being stronger community support, better projects, and practices driven in partnership with and by the community.

Additional Resources

Atlanta Community Engagement Playbook <http://ourcommunity.is/engaged/action-guides/>

Bassler, A. et al., "[Developing Effective Citizen Engagement: A How-to Guide for Community Leaders.](#)" *Center for Rural America*, 2008

California Public Utilities Commission (May 2014). Intervenor Compensation Program Guide and Instructions. <https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/icom/>

City of Minneapolis (2016). Blueprint for Equitable Engagement. <http://www.minneapolismn.gov/www/groups/public/@ncr/documents/webcontent/wcmstp-187047.pdf>

City of Durham, Equitable Community Engagement Blueprint. https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/durhamnis/pages/592/attachments/original/1543332399/Draft_Equitable_Engagement_Blueprint_%2818%29_11.06.pdf?1543332399

"Community-Driven Transit Oriented Development Planning," Authored By Giulia Pasciuto, Sandra McNeill, Rene Rodriguez, Noel Toro; Edited By Giulia Pasciuto. T.R.U.S.T. South LA in collaboration with Abode Communities http://trustsouthla.org/~trust/todguide/uploads/images/TOD_130929.pdf

CUNY Institute for State & Local Government (2018). Equitable Development Guidelines. http://www1.cuny.edu/sites/islg/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2018/08/ISLG_EquitableDevelopmentGuidelinesupdated.pdf

Elevated Chicago Community Engagement Principles and Recommendations (2019) <http://www.elevatedchicago.org/engage/>

Government Alliance on Race & Equity (2018). Racial Equity Toolkit: An Opportunity to Operationalize Equity. https://www.racialequityalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/GARE-Racial_Equity_Toolkit.pdf

Groundwork USA: Inclusive Community Engagement https://groundworkusa.org/egdev_category/inclusive-community-engagement/

Haas Institute's Civic Engagement Narrative Change: <https://haasinstitute.berkeley.edu/ce>

IAP2 (2018). IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum. https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/foundations_course/IAP2_P2_Spectrum_FINAL.pdf

ICMA, "Community Engagement Continuum and Worksheet" <https://icma.org/documents/community-engagement-continuum-and-worksheet>

King County. Equity and Social Justice Tools and Resources.

<https://kingcounty.gov/elected/executive/equity-social-justice/tools-resources.aspx>

PCORI – Budgeting for engagement activities

<https://www.pcori.org/sites/default/files/PCORI-Budgeting-for-Engagement-Activities.pdf>

Policy link <http://www.policylink.org/resources-tools/community-engagement-guide-for-sustainable-communities>

“Encouraging Involvement in Community Work.” Community Tool Box

<https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/participation/encouraging-involvement>