

# Accelerating Public Engagement

*a Roadmap for Local Government*

by Eric Gordon



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# Executive Summary

More than ever before, public engagement is central to the work of governments on local, state and national levels. Moving beyond outreach practices, which generally involve activities that broadcast to communities what governments do and deflect what they don't do, public engagement is a two-way process that entails ongoing interaction and listening to generate mutual benefit. Establishing a fluid and open-ended dialogue across the boundary between a government and its communities can lead to better-informed policies that effectively communicate messages, solve problems and deliver services in new, creative, and impactful ways. Yet, despite enthusiasm for public engagement, there is no well-supported formula for how to do it effectively. What is clear is that engagement should incorporate today's dynamic media landscape, cultural norms of responsiveness, and expectations of user friendliness in a context of reciprocity and long-term partnership.

This guide captures learning from the

experiences of five city governments, and learning from the experiences of a variety of departments of five city governments across the United States who are members of the City Accelerator initiative, which is a collaboration between Living Cities and the Citi Foundation established in 2015. City officials from Albuquerque, Atlanta, Baltimore, New Orleans, and Seattle participated in an eighteen-month program to design and implement projects that engage lower-income residents on various issues ranging from re-entry services to public health campaigns. Each city was awarded \$100,000 over the life of the project. The cities received technical assistance and guidance from the Engagement Lab through monthly conference



calls and quarterly convenings, to hone in on their approaches. The Engagement Lab is an applied research lab at Emerson College in Boston working on re-imagining civic engagement in a digital culture. (See Appendix 2 for the overarching goals of the City Accelerator cohort on Revitalizing Public Engagement).

In addition to detailing the work of these five cities, this guide provides a background on public engagement and offers practical and detailed approaches for city officials nationwide to use when planning engagement processes. With this guide, you will:

- learn about the crucial concept of co-production as a frame for public engagement.
- understand, through real world examples, the complexity of effective communication and relationship building.
- learn how to balance the key ingredients of a successful public engagement process, including creativity, inclusivity, and transparency; and...
- be taken through a step-by-step process, grounded in design-thinking methods, of planning a public engagement process.



There is no one-size-fits-all public engagement tool or technique (See Appendix 1 for a list of existing toolkits). Approaches to public engagement must continually adapt and evolve along with the communities they serve. As such, this guide walks you through best practices for how to manage the ever-changing landscape of public engagement.

Figures 1 and 2: Members of the City Accelerator cohort on public engagement play the game “Chart the Course” and tinker with the data analysis suite [DataBasic](#) to try new approaches for public strategizing.



# Introduction

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In order for local government to do its job well, it needs to listen and be responsive to citizen needs. This has always been the case, but it has not always been common practice. Local government is notorious for being impervious, out-of-touch, and indifferent to social circumstance. “You can’t fight city hall” is a common refrain symbolizing the disconnect between people and government. But, recent developments in social media and digital technologies have enabled bottom-up surveillance and renewed government accountability. Innovations in data usage and participatory processes across public and private sectors have increased expectations of participation and feedback and created a kind of “smart consumer” of government services. All of this has amplified the need for public engagement in everyday governance and created some pressure on government offices to figure out how to do it effectively.

There is no universal formula, as each city has unique demographics, geography, and socio-cultural circumstances, but there are best practices and common values to which practitioners can adhere. This guide is meant to foster learning and support for municipal governments as they adopt transformative practices of public engagement and embed them into their day-to-day work. It will also

provide insights into the organizational structure that can best support this work. It emerges out of an eighteen-month experimental process called the City Accelerator (CA), funded by the Citi Foundation and supported by Living Cities and the Engagement Lab at Emerson College. CA is comprised of a cohort of five US cities, each tasked with inventing and implementing an innovative approach to public engagement (See Appendix 3). Each came to the cohort with a specific policy or social problem to address.

- In Albuquerque, a minority-majority city, there is a need to hear and be responsive to the voices of immigrant entrepreneurs.
- In Baltimore, there is a need to build systems that are directly responsive to people returning to their communities from prison.
- In Atlanta, residents of the city’s underserved Westside neighborhoods need to assure that their voices are heard as a new stadium and rapid gentrification takes place.
- In Seattle, the City needs to rethink its internal procedures for interacting with communities.
- In New Orleans, the City aims to encourage more low-income residents to take advantage of primary health care benefits.

Over the course of eighteen months, the experiments each city took to address these problems, including foibles and successes, were captured and are shared here to benefit public institutions seeking to become more responsive to public needs.

As a whole, it takes a very tactical approach to spur organizational change by providing guidance for small or large teams within government to plan and execute responsible, effective public engagement strategies that take into consideration the real-world restraints of time and limited resources. Effective public engagement needs to be **mapped** in a new cultural, political and technological terrain. The guide's first section is its conceptual backbone. Called *CALIBRATING THE INSTRUMENTS*, the section lays out all the major concepts that have bearing on public engagement. From strategies of co-design to communication systems and partnerships, this section provides a conceptual calibration for public engagement.

**"This guide is meant to foster learning and support for municipal governments as they adopt transformative practices of public engagement and embed them into their day-to-day work."**

The second section is more practical and applied. Called *CHARTING THE COURSE*, it is where the actual mapmaking takes place. Once instruments are calibrated, cities need to figure out all the components that can be mapped and how to use them constructively to navigate difficult terrain. This section is meant to help individuals, teams, or entire offices form and execute strategies for understanding the impact and value of public engagement. And finally, the concluding section, entitled *GOING PLACES*, is a reflection on where we've been and a prompt for where we can go.

Public engagement is not easy. This guide does nothing to dispel that suspicion, and in fact, it verifies it. The goal of this guide, and indeed, the goal of you reading it, is to provide low barrier points of entry for people to appreciate and integrate effective public engagement strategies into the everyday work of government.





# Calibrating the Instruments

This section details a conceptual framework that will help practitioners identify problems and build strong strategies for public engagement. It should be read prior to the planning phase as it clarifies terms and illustrates useful planning exercises.

## *Defining Citizenship*

The five cases on which this guide is based illustrate a shift in how city governments think about their work: from the delivery of pre-defined services to the *co-production* of services through impactful public engagement. **Co-production is any process that directly engages constituents in the planning and implementation of services and programs.**<sup>1</sup> But as most city governments understand, co-production is more than just a choice to engage constituents in decision-making. It requires a deep understanding of what communities need and how they express themselves over time and place. Individ-

uals and communities of all shapes and colors are inventing new ways of expressing their voice. And while some people, through organization, mobilization and struggle, have long been able to take action against or be heard by government, as a result

**“Co-production is any process that directly engages constituents in the planning and implementation of services and programs.”**

of a number of technological and cultural shifts, the last several years has seen a qualitative shift in methods and process both in **how communities organize and mobilize, and how government listens and collaborates.** According to Kathy Nyland, Director of Neighborhood Services at the

City of Seattle, her department “has been involved in more policy meetings in the last eight months than in the last eight years.” Increasingly, people expect to be heard; and government is expected to listen. Frank Mirabal, Director of Collective Impact at the City of Albuquerque, put it in historical context: “Had there

not been this really international discussion about citizen engagement, and if every public agency was not trying to improve their citizen engagement practices to begin with, [public engagement programs] might be nonstarters. But because of the

<sup>1</sup> Herman, John. 2009. *Engaging Public Sector Clients: From Service-Delivery to Co-Production* Basingstoke, UK; Palgrave Macmillan and Tony Bovaird, 2007. *Beyond engagement and participation: User and community coproduction of public services.* *Public Administration Review* 67:846-860.

time and the place we find ourselves where this is something that's fortunately being prioritized across systems and jurisdictions, I think there's a real willingness to try and incorporate [public engagement]."

New technologies have not caused this shift, but they have informed it.<sup>2</sup> Across the board, the changing ways in which people communicate and connect with one another has diminished the role of formal institutions in everyday life: from government, to civil society organizations, to media. As a result, people are less likely to join civic organizations,<sup>3</sup> like the rotary club, and people no longer source their news from only a few trusted sources—like big city newspa-

pers.<sup>4</sup> In addition, trust in government is at an all-time low.<sup>5</sup> In many cases, people are able to get things done better and more efficiently with minimal government interference. While it is not likely that loosely joined networks will replace institutions like government, it is likely that government will continue to get compared to private sector services with a heavy online presence. Kathy Nyland, from the City of Seattle, laments that she is often asked: why the City can't be 'more like Amazon?' Simply put, people want better customer service from city departments. Otherwise, they will steadily lose trust in the institutions upon which they are dependent.

Too often, when government talks about public engagement, what they really mean is consumer engagement. This slippage between the citizen (defined by the whole of their human rights and responsibilities) and a consumer (defined by their singular consumption of goods or services),

is problematic. Public engagement of citizens should remain distinct from consumer engagement. The goal of local government should be to provide services and empower citizens to act and advocate for their needs. This is not always in alignment with the goal of creating dependent, "happy customers."

Happiness, for which the Declaration of Independence guarantees the right to pursue, is not a fixed state. It is a potential, towards which every citizen should have the freedom

to aspire. As soon as this freedom is characterized as a specific state of being, it becomes saturated with values and norms and represents a limiting, manipulative logic. So when government officials

ponder the definition of 21st-century citizenship, marked by the promise of increasingly usable services through the good design of technology, they should avoid confusing the happy customer with the happy citizen.

What it means to be a citizen—not in terms of legality, but in terms of belonging—is changing. Where civics education was once about knowing the three branches of government and how a bill becomes a

law, giving way to a "rights-bearing" one, sociologist Michael Schudson sees the "informed citizen" model as focused on the opportunity ability to exercise rights.<sup>6</sup> Communication scholar Lance Bennett points as well to a shift away from the "dutiful" citizen, wherein people engage out of duty, towards a "self-actualizing" citizen, wherein people's motivations are much more personal and self-directed.<sup>7</sup> The evidence is fairly clear that these transformations are taking place, including



Figure 3: Citizens are more than just happy customers.

**“Happiness, for which the Declaration of Independence guarantees the right to pursue, is not a fixed state. It is a potential, towards which every citizen should have the freedom to aspire.”**

<sup>2</sup> Gordon, Eric, Jessica Baldwin-Philippi, and Marina Balestra. (2013). *Why We Engage: How Theories of Human Behavior Contribute to Our Understanding of Civic Engagement in a Digital Era*. SSRN Electronic Journal, (21). doi:10.2139/ssrn.2343762

<sup>3</sup> Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Edited by Simon And Schuster. Book. Vol. 115. A Touchstone Book. Simon & Schuster.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, Aaron, Kay Lehman Schlozman, Sidney Verba, and Henry Brady. 2009. "The Internet and Civic Engagement." *Pew Internet & American Life Project*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.

<sup>5</sup> "Public Trust in Government: 1958-2014", *Pew Research Center*, November 13, 2014. <http://www.people-press.org/2014/11/13/public-trust-in-government/>

<sup>6</sup> Schudson, Michael. 1998. *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life*. New York: Free Press.

<sup>7</sup> Bennett, W Lance, and Alexandra Segerberg. 2012. "The Logic of Connective Action." *Information, Communication, & Society* 15 (5): 37-41.

an increased distrust in institutions of all sorts (especially government), fueled by (but not caused by) new digital channels of participation and corresponding expectations of interaction and responsiveness.

But there is an important difference between a rights-bearing, self-actualizing citizen and a happy customer. One is about self-definition and the other is about the quality of a transaction. And while consumer brands try hard to disguise these differences (your phone and your clothes define you), government should resist the urge to do so. According to Chris LeDantec, Assistant Professor at Georgia Tech and Coordinator of Atlanta’s City Accelerator project, “There seems to be a tension between the transactional and the relational way of working as an organization. The question is whether the city makes the effort to relate to different parts of different communities and different neighborhoods, or if they approach it as a customer service model that tends to be more transactional.”

What are the actions that municipal government can take to transform transactions into meaningful relationships? In other words, how can government foster meaning making, cultivate con-

nections between people, and encourage self-directed action? One approach is to recognize and counter the commonplace blurring of two separate actions: outreach and engagement. Letting people know about what you’re doing through outreach is

not the same thing as involving people in doing things together through engagement. Cities are spending millions of dollars on outreach consultants each year, perpetuating the cycle of transaction, publicity, transaction, publicity. Public engagement is not the work of communication departments, but of every department in city government. Citizenship is not simply the sum of good transactions. It is relational and personal.

If government is truly committed to meaningfully engaging the public beyond transaction, then it needs to build platforms, tools, and processes that allow for it on an ongoing basis. Happiness might be understood as a sense of community or a sense of place. It is the experience of some kind of perceived resolution. Government may not need to provide happiness for people, but it does need to provide the context in which people are able to seek it out for themselves.

**“Citizenship is not simply the sum of good transactions. It is relational and personal.”**

## THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

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Meaningful engagement requires new ways of listening and responding to citizens.

Improved communication can happen through leveraging networked technologies and media that people already use.

Co-production is any process that directly engages constituents in the planning and implementation of services and programs.

Citizens are not merely users or consumers of services. Government co-production should reflect the whole citizen’s needs and values while employing local cultural resources.

## Professionalization of Engagement

The current popularity of “engagement” provides an opportunity to question core values and rethink how institutions connect with and involve constituents in their work. As journalist John Herrman writes in “Tech is Eating the Media. Now What?,” newspapers are rethinking the value of paper as a mode of distribution, as well as the general purpose and function of disseminating news.<sup>8</sup> Public-sector institutions of all sorts are questioning how they represent, organize and mobilize communities.<sup>9</sup> Both locally and nationally, they are wondering how they can open up, be more responsive and accountable while addressing their constituents’ needs and providing them with information, services and regulation. In effect, ‘business as usual’ for city governments is no longer an option.

Pressures to change are coming from all levels within government, but often the mandates are abstract calls for “better public engagement,” with little practical guidance as to how to do it. Over the last several years, there have been multiple offices of public engagement launched in the United States, cabinet level positions for it, and a smattering of new initiatives. In 2009, President Obama re-

named the White House Liaison Office to Office of Public Engagement, with the expressed mission of being the “front door to the White House.”<sup>10</sup> In 2015, the federal government’s Consumer Financial Protection Bureau created the Division of

Consumer Engagement and Education. But often these offices operate in isolation with no authority to impact programmatic work. It is imperative that government figure out ways of incorporating engagement practices into the everyday functioning of government.

Just as there are many ways of engaging the public, there are many ways of organizing the work of public engagement within city government—from a highly distributed model where each department is tasked separately with creating and running a process, to a

more centralized model where one office oversees all of a city’s work. The City of Albuquerque, for example, does not have an Office of Engagement. Rather than a centralized agency, all departments are tasked with creating and integrating new policies that reflect a broader push to promote public engagement across different sectors of society. According to Frank Mirabal, “really what we’re

trying to do is embed innovation [in public engagement] throughout city government.” On the other hand, in the City of Seattle, the Office of Neighborhoods works across different departments to assure that each is appropriately responsive to neighborhoods

when addressing such issues as public policy and operating in complex environments. This centralized model has its challenges, however, as there is considerable coordination required in the sharing of objectives, information and authority. Central-

**“Pressures to change are coming from all levels within government, but often the mandates are abstract calls for “better public engagement,” with little practical guidance as to how to do it.”**



Figure 4: As public input becomes increasingly valuable, more positions for public engagement are being created.

<sup>8</sup>John Herman, Tech Is Eating Media. Now What?, Medium, <https://medium.com/@jwherrman/tech-is-eating-media-now-what-807047ad4cdc#.ooigvfit>. November 9th, 2015. Accessed November 8th, 2016.

<sup>9</sup>See the work of the MobLab at Greenpeace, “Mobilisation Lab for Greenpeace and it’s Allies”: <http://www.mobilisationlab.org/>, accessed October 5th, 2016.

<sup>10</sup>The White House under President Barack Obama. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ope/about-archived>. Accessed November 8, 2016.

ly driven policies also require infrastructure, resources and ongoing political commitment. Yet, at the same time, centralization may offer greater accountability and consolidated reporting for government as a whole. Whatever approach is chosen, centralized or distributed, it is important that the decision about organizational structure be deliberate and justified.

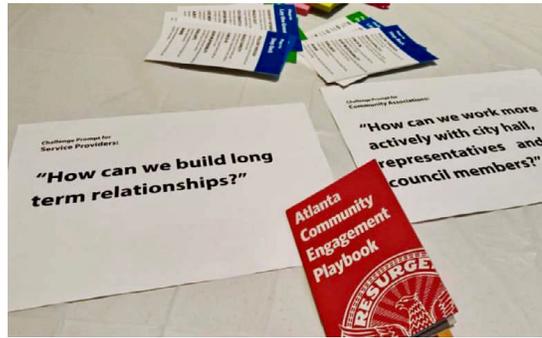


Figure 5 (above): The City of Atlanta prompts residents, stakeholders, and city employees to consider how to improve relationship-building between the city and communities during a Community Engagement Playbook launch session.



Figure 6 (left): The City of Atlanta brainstorms communication strategies for public engagement.

## THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

Institutions are facing increased pressures to adapt to new modes of communication and to be more responsive to their constituents.

There is a national trend of integrating public engagement practices and policies within government, though there are numerous ways of structuring related agencies, activities, and processes.

## Co-production in Action

Meaningful participation in government requires co-production, where citizens collaborate with government at all stages of decision-making on public issues. According to Daniel Atzmon from the Office of Public Safety in the City of Baltimore, “Good services are gonna be what people want or what people need. And the only way to understand what people need is to include them in the process of designing and implementing those

services. Otherwise, you’re approaching it from the deficit perspective, which history’s shown doesn’t quite work out that well.” Co-production is a transformative tool for social change. From the most modest feedback on a plan to designing public policies, government should always think about its work as a form of co-production and collaborate with constituents.

Government-citizen collaboration can take many different forms; from a town hall meeting where the public provides feedback on a plan, to a 311 system (a telephone hotline and mobile app) that captures citizen reports, to a city-wide hackathon where the public can participate in making technologies to solve community-wide problems using government data sets. Each example is a form of co-production, where the end result of a citizen participation process is a decision, tool, or

service that advances the work of government.

The countless opportunities for co-production may not only facilitate partnerships between community leaders and governments, but also help to create new opportunities to re-engage and recruit new members of the public into decision-making processes. For instance, the 311 system enables people who do not attend town hall meetings, for whatever reason, to express their concerns and

stay up-to-date with community issues in an easier way. This widely accessible telephone service can also enable governments to understand a diversity of viewpoints other than the ones expressed by the loudest and most organized leaders or groups. Therefore, a combination of public engagement approaches that aim for a wide cross section of the community can holistically address community-wide concerns and values, and simultaneously engage more citizens in the planning and imple-

mentation of projects that significantly influence their lives.

Every public engagement process requires tradeoffs. Teams are necessarily going to have to make hard decisions about what’s important and how to invest time. It’s useful to think about the design of public en-

gagement processes as falling into three categories: creativity, inclusivity, and transparency. Cre-



Figure 7: Community members receive resources at a Seattle public engagement meeting.

**“Good services are gonna be what people want or what people need. And the only way to understand what people need is to include them in the process of designing and implementing those services. Otherwise, you’re approaching it from the deficit perspective, which history’s shown doesn’t quite work out that well.”**

activity is how imaginative a tactic is. Do you invest in a beautiful website, an interactive game, a performance? Inclusivity is the amount of effort you put into reaching those people who are the hardest to reach. Do you invest in new data sets, door-to-door canvassing, translation services? Transparency is how you communicate your process to others. Do you share all of your data? Do you put effort into visualization of decision-making? Do you invest in responding to every comment or request? While all processes should include creativity, inclusivity and transparency, there will always be limited resources and there will always be hard decisions that have to be made about a process. It is important to be clear, however, about why you're making the decisions you make. These tradeoffs are simulated in the board game *Chart the Course* available online on the Engagement Lab website.

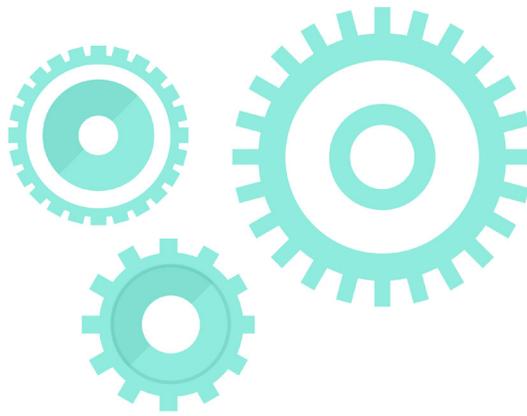


Figure 8: Government and citizen collaboration can take many forms to co-produce public services.

## THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

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Co-production can take many forms, from civic technology applications, to a town-hall meeting, to a hackathon.

Public engagement planning requires tradeoffs between three major areas: creativity, inclusivity, and transparency. It is important to be clear about what you're prioritizing.

## Conceptual Models of Public Engagement

There are powerful conceptual models of public engagement that currently exist. For example, the International Association of Public Participation's (IAP2) identifies five stages of public impact. From informing the public to

Especially with online engagements, what appears only informative can easily be shared, spread, amplified, and ultimately made empowering.

The co-production frame also demonstrates that any discrete action taken by a government body is part of a larger civic effort. If the goal of public engagement is increased use of health services, for example, there might be several steps required to achieve the goal, including: 1) informing the public about existing services, 2) getting input into future services, and 3) designing tools that make access to services easier. Each of these pieces needs to be considered separately, factoring in who will be impacted by each stage, and then designed appropriately. Altogether, the distinct pieces are interrelated and chosen to achieve the overarching goal. If new housing policy is needed, a similar set of steps should be employed toward achieving a broader long-term goal. The above highlights yet another limitation with the linear and segmented IAP2 framework - a typical town hall meeting might be considered mere consultation, even though informing is a necessary step towards input and design. The co-production frame makes the following claim: "together, we will make good policy" or, "together, we will implement quality services." Keeping in mind outcomes, co-production goals

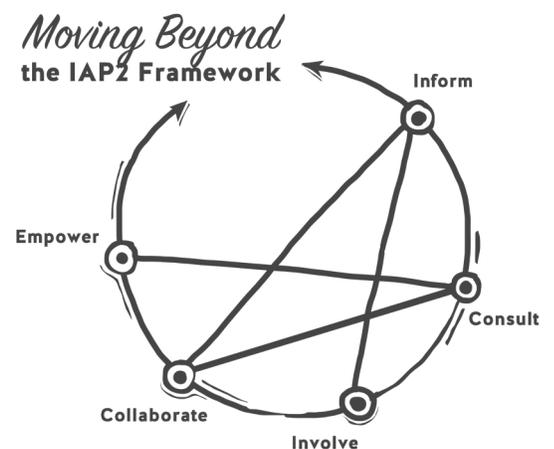
### IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation



Figure 9 (above): The International Association for Public Participation's framework for informing and working with public stakeholders

Figure 10 (right): A cyclical, iterative, and non-linear interpretation of the IAP2 framework

empowering the public, the model's thematic spectrum suggests a continuum of strategies with increasing returns on impact. Though this may offer useful ways of thinking about the work of government, the main limitation of this particular model is its linearity. Public engagement processes do not typically land on one point within the spectrum. Any given strategy can inform and empower at the same time. For example, a town hall meeting that appropriately emphasizes translation and accessibility is informing and consultative, and if people are able to take a leadership role in generating action steps, then it is also collaborative and potentially empowering. Consider a Facebook campaign on affordable housing started by a local community. The City, in this case, is the one that needs to be informed, and through deep listening it can also effectively empower those involved by giving them authority in related decision-making processes. Co-production is multi-directional and multi-dimensional. And each of the five categories of the IAP2 spectrum should be considered as individually powerful and simultaneously possible. Using co-production as a frame for the spectrum allows for a focus on outcomes as well as process.





should be established at the start of a project and systematically addressed throughout all distinct steps or pieces.

When government policies and programs are co-produced with citizens, they are more sustainable and promote a broader understanding of related issues. When people feel a sense of ownership, they are more likely to also feel a sense of commitment and responsibility. Creating conditions for quality co-production, then, is essential infrastructure to good governance. Daniel Atzmon from the City of Baltimore emphasized this point: “[Public engagement] is just as vital as picking up the trash, filtering the water, and

keeping traffic lights running. The public residents are our key stakeholders, and if we don’t take into account their complaints—a) my bosses would all get voted out of office, and b) we wouldn’t be responsive to the needs of a community... So not only do we need to keep them happy and work as partners as the ultimate ‘boss’ if you will, but they are a key source of information we need to do our jobs well.”



504HealthNet @504HealthNet · 5 Dec 2015

Why do people w coverage not seek the care they need? #StandUpGetCare #CityAccelerator @Living\_Cities



Figures 11 and 12: Brainstorming sessions and notes from the Design Day for improving use of primary health care services in New Orleans

**THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:**

Co-production involves a **symmetrical relationship of power** between citizens and decision-makers, where citizen input dictates or guides public engagement project outcomes.

The depth of an individual’s participation can fluctuate throughout an engagement process.

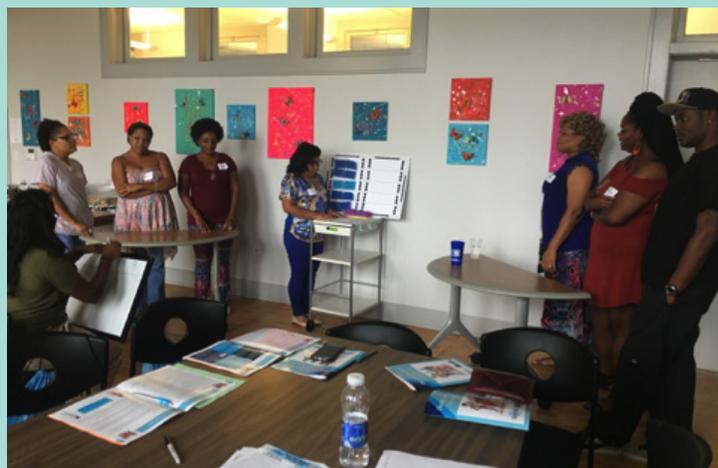
Public engagement takes place on many different, and sometimes simultaneous, levels—from the exchange of information to in-depth citizen engagement on service delivery and project operations.

## Case Study: New Orleans

After the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and a statewide rejection of the benefits of the federal Affordable Care act, the availability and accessibility of healthcare for low-income residents was dangerously limited. The hurricane completely destroyed the city’s main public hospital, affectionately known as “Big Charity,” and a system of distributed clinics took its place. People were uncertain about where to receive their healthcare and/or simply chose not to use the benefits afforded them. Understanding the reasons for non-use was the big question; providing opportunities for investing in one’s health and well-being was the big challenge.

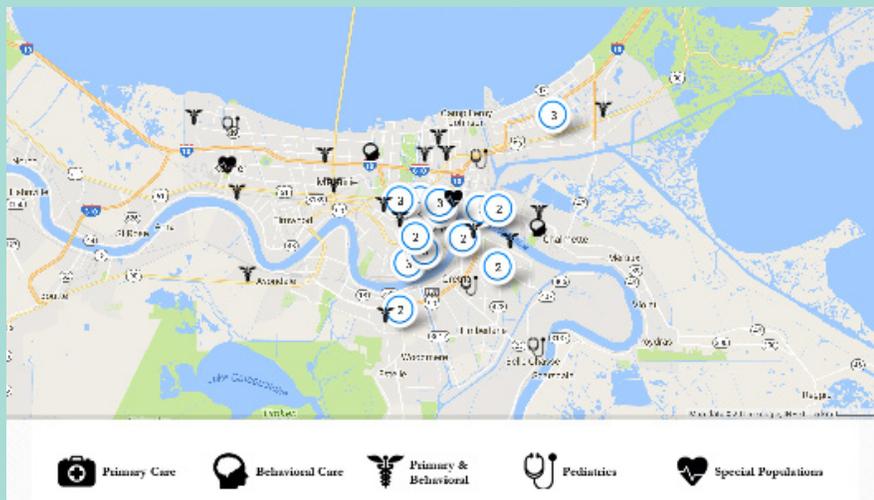
As part of the City Accelerator program, the City, in cooperation with the non-profit 504HealthNet, created the campaign “Stand Up And Get Care,” designed to listen and respond to the city’s low-income residents. Emphasizing the element of inclusion, New Orleans staged a “Design Day” and heavily recruited low-income people from all across the city to participate. Most importantly, they didn’t just seek opinions, but sought open collaboration through exercises and problem-solving sessions wherein participants were tasked with improving healthcare access for everyone in the city.

Based on feedback and results from “Design Day,” New Orleans worked with The Behavioural Insights Team to encourage the continuing use of primary health services through A/B testing of text messages. Since technology alone is not enough for lasting results, the City launched a Health Ambassador program which followed a “train the trainer” model for people to encourage their neighbors to use primary healthcare services with a robust toolkit. The feedback received was then used directly by the City Hall Department’s health literacy committee to improve the department’s website and health education materials.

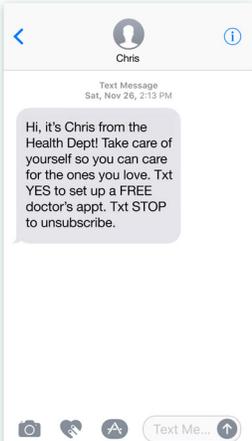


Figures 13 and 14: New Orleans Health Ambassador trainings to help with primary health care prevention





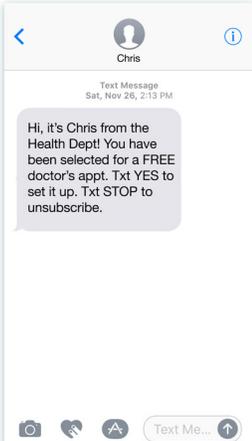
### Social Motivation

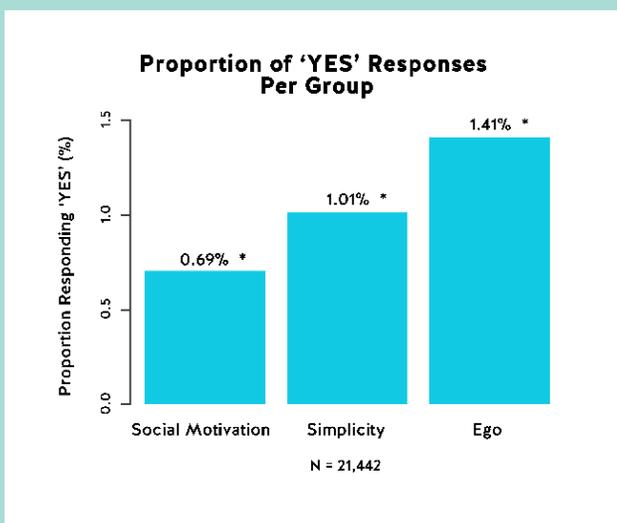


### Simplicity



### Ego





The Stand Up and Get Care Campaign campaign was spearheaded by the non-profit 504HealthNet which supports low-income, under-insured and uninsured populations in accessing health care. Design Day solicited input from locals about their primary health care habits. Participants shared their barriers to healthcare and brainstormed creative solutions. In partnership with the Behavioral Insights Team, the campaign tested SMS types appealing to social motivation, ego, and simplicity.

## Meaningful Inefficiencies

The consistent message in this document is that co-production is not a straightforward path. Shared ownership and responsibility may entail a constant give and take, active dialogue, and a lot of unplanned messiness in all stages of decision-making. Unfortunately, this messiness often conflicts with the strong desire to make public engagement processes as efficient and practical as possible. Striving for maximum efficiency and cost-effectiveness is in fact core to traditional ideas of ‘good governance.’ Yet, inviting citizen participation requires a different way of thinking. Trust build-

ing, community nurturing, and true, meaningful input is never straightforward. This is not to suggest that governments should stop improving the efficiency of transactions including how services are communicated (i.e. paying parking tickets, clarifying service provision, etc.) and ways to increase public feedback (i.e. 311 systems, online surveys, etc.). Indeed, an improved user experience will help governments seem more credible and transparent in the eyes of their constituents. It might even make people happy. But government’s responsibilities should not end with making happy custom-

ers. That’s where it should begin. The transaction is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Sadly, one of the unanticipated consequences of the recent popularity of civic technology, and the allure of big data, is a systematic blindness to the responsibility

of government to cultivate dialogue and meaning, and co-produce value.

As a counter argument to customer satisfaction and efficiency, it is useful to consider co-production as a kind of *meaningful inefficiency*, where government systems are designed such that users have the option to *play* within and with rules, not simply to *play out* prescribed tasks.<sup>11</sup> Consider a conversation on the local social network *NextDoor*. People talk about lost animals, their favorite sports teams, house parties, *and* an upcoming ballot

initiative. If a platform was set up only to gather feedback on an issue, the inefficiencies of dialogue would be left out, and so would the meanings and connections that come with them. This is not advocating for *mere* inefficiencies, where systems are simply not designed well and users experience confusion caused by lag in the system (when you have to mail in a check to pay a parking ticket, for

example, or that beach ball on your computer just won’t stop spinning). The often unpredictable outcomes that come from public engagement can create nuance in how people relate to issues and understand their community. Like the act of play, public engagement is almost necessarily inefficient in terms of time and resources in the short term. What is often said of games is that the goal of playing a game is to play the game. In other words,

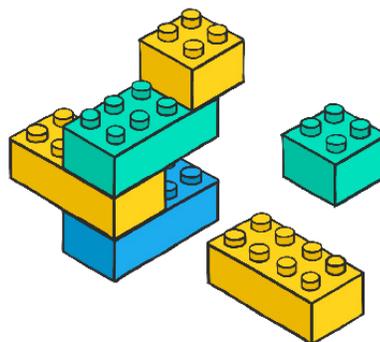
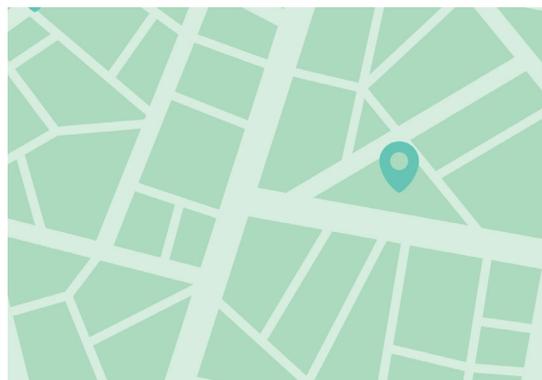


Figure 15: Unplanned messiness in public engagement creates opportunity for connection through play and learning.



<sup>11</sup> Gordon, Eric, and Stephen Walter. 2016. “Meaningful Inefficiencies: Resisting the Logic of Technological Efficiency in the Design of Civic Tech.” In *Civic Media: Technology, Design, Practice*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

if the game is too easy or ends too soon, then the game did not do what it was intended to do, which is to give the player the opportunity to play. While public engagement has to be outcome-oriented, it also has to be thought of as a process that has intrinsic value for the participant.

Much of the work cities are doing as part of the City Accelerator cohort on public engagement veers towards meaningful inefficiencies. For example, the City of Albuquerque, in its attempt to better source and provide resources for immigrant entrepreneurs, has launched a series of community “deep dives” with the mayor and several “design-thinking” workshops to harness the collective concerns and social innovation of the population. There is nothing efficient about long conversations, but the team in Albuquerque would say that there is no other way to do this work. Or as Ariel White, a social worker and project coordinator in New Orleans suggests, “Once you engage people a little bit, and then it

comes up a little bit more, and then you get a little bit more of it, it’s like Incrementalism in Government 101. It’s this slow, continuous outreach and engagement. Showing up, and being there, having great service delivery, showing people that you care—that’s the best thing that we do. I show up at the libraries and the bars and the other places. It’s

really about slow, steady engagement.”

The City of Baltimore seeks to understand gaps in service delivery and communications impacting people reintegrating back into society from prison. To do so, they have organized peer-led focus groups and design sessions in the interest

of cultivating community and networks. As a result, the City has created a mobile app designed in a co-production process between government and the direct recipients of services. The lesson is that mere efficiencies developed outside of community connections and trust, will go unused.



Figure 16: Detroit Roaming Table is an example of a meaningful inefficiency (Photo credit: Detroit Collaborative Design Center).

## THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

While efficiency in some civic services which often focus on exchange and transaction may result in public satisfaction, government also needs to prioritize dialogue and participation.

Many citizen contributions including ideas, questions, and attendance at events are inherently inefficient but important to building trust and relationships.

Meaningful inefficiencies can increase the sustainability and adoption of public services and strengthen community networks and partnerships.

## Case Study: Atlanta

Atlanta's Westside neighborhoods have deep connections to the city's, and the nation's, civil rights movement. The Westside is where the adult home of Martin Luther King, Jr. is located, and where people connected and organized during the civil rights movement. The Westside was then, and still is, predominantly African American and poor. The new Falcon's stadium, located in the heart of the Westside, is displacing current residents. The goal of the City Accelerator project in Atlanta is to develop an inclusive and transparent process in the asymmetrical relationship between the city and many of its poorest residents.



Given the tensions surrounding this topic, the city of Atlanta's team knew that elements of inclusion and transparency were vital to their work. While the team originally intended to collect narratives from the neighborhoods, they pivoted toward supporting existing neighborhood efforts, instead of surfacing new content. They invested time researching how Westside neighborhoods would like to be communicated with through a series of engagement workshops. They also interviewed close to 100 city employees to understand their communication practices. The results of which gave the city team methods and tactics for how the city could be a productive partner on future public projects. The Atlanta team then created a two-part [Community Engagement Playbook](#) for city officials and community advocates to use during project planning. The playbook emphasizes themes of transparency and responsiveness and provides a clear framework for implementation.

Although the residents of the Westside neighborhoods were not engaged in the initial planning for the stadium, the playbook has created a framework for all future efforts. The project is a perfect example of meaningful inefficiencies. The Playbook is a clear outcome, but it emerged out of relationships, open dialogue, and collaboration. Importantly, this project was accomplished through a strong relationship between the City and a faculty member at Georgia Tech. The university collaboration provided stability, access to researchers and students, and a rigor of method that would not have been possible otherwise (See the next section on University partnerships).



Figures 17 and 18: Community engagement workshop facilitated by the City of Atlanta, Georgia Tech, the Westside Future Fund, and The Atlanta Housing Authority



During a playbook presentation meeting, input was collected from residents, community associations, City department staff, and service providers. Guiding principles and specific plays were workshopped by participants to capture the key ingredients to successful public engagement planning. The playbook includes: principles, action guides, plays, and checklists for implementing mutually-beneficial partnerships.

## University Partnerships

Universities are filled with researchers. Researchers are interested in whatever they are studying and tend to have a laser focus on one particular question. They are motivated to partner with government either because they want access to data or they are interested in applying their research to real-world situations. It is also possible that they are looking for student projects or course partners.

But establishing and sustaining university-government collaborative research projects is an especially complex process. They are limited by research structures, semester cycles, and faculty interest. In many instances, the flow and exchange of data from universities to government and society at large may be limited. Nevertheless, government-university research projects and programs that align with the interests of both parties hold great potential in skill development, knowledge transfer, and can also tap into additional and much-needed funding sources.

Several participants in the second cohort of the City Accelerator have leveraged partnerships with local universities in powerful ways. The City of Atlanta partnered with a faculty member at Georgia Tech to design an inclusive and creative process, conduct and analyze interviews, and design a Playbook that has since been widely adopted by the City. Baltimore's "We Are Here 4 Reentry" project, designed to assist and engage citizens returning from prison or jail, partnered with the Maryland Institute College of Art to plan and host community meetings, and used the

College's equipment for filming and printing.

With over 100 colleges and universities in the Greater Boston region, the City of Boston is a particularly relevant and appropriate locale for establishing platforms that support mutually beneficial relationships and the flow of information among researchers and practitioners. The Boston Area Research Initiative (BARI) provides one such platform that connects the region's scholars, policymakers and civic leaders to spur two-way original urban research on the "cutting edge of social science and public policy." Another example is the [Boston Civic Media Consortium](#), which is a consortium of university faculty and their community/government partners intended to centralize questions of civic life in the academic study of media and technology. The consortium supports classes around a "wicked problem" in universities across the city. Government is a partner in framing the problem and amplifying the solutions that emerge from the consortium.

**“What is clear from these aforementioned initiatives is that researchers (despite having a reputation for being idiosyncratic and encapsulated in a bubble far removed from realities on the ground) often want to make their work relevant to the wider society and are thus interested to find direct application for their research to policy and planning.”**

Some of the nuances of these research partnerships have been spelled out by the Engagement Lab and the MacArthur Foundation in a report entitled [Design Action Research in Government](#).<sup>12</sup> What is clear from these aforementioned initiatives is that researchers (despite having a reputation for being idiosyncratic and encapsulated in a bubble far removed from realities on the ground) often want to make their work relevant to the wider society and are thus interested to find direct application for their research to policy and planning. In fact,

<sup>12</sup> Baldwin-Philippi, J., Gordon, E., Jacob, N., and C. Osgood. 2013. *Design Action Research with Government: A guidebook*. MacArthur Foundation Report.

researchers in the social and political sciences are increasingly engaging communities as partners to find solutions to complex problems and facilitate positive social change.

Often, government-university partnerships are governed only by University Institutional Review Boards (IRBs), which are set up to protect human subjects of research. In practice, they are set up to protect universities from liability. Last year, my research team at the Engagement Lab launched the Community-Academic Research Partnerships (CARP) project. Interviews with community organizations and government pointed to how

academics in Boston were generally perceived to possess more resources and socio-political clout than practitioners to set research priorities and derive use-value from the data generated. What's more is that the modern context for research, that most notably involves digital tools and platforms, raises a complex and evolving set of ethical questions relating to privacy, consent, and motivations for partnerships, that neither party is prepared to effectively deal with. Although IRBs are set up at

institutions to govern the modalities and ethics of human subjects research, the community in question is usually never brought to the table when evaluating the ethics and relevance of research, and it's also not mandatory for communities to participate in other core decision-making processes that may have profound social and cultural implications. One of the results of this work has been the creation

of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) template that can be used to clarify goals and intentions for each partner in "research collaboration."

While Boston may be an extraordinary case because of the sheer amount of universities in

the area, most cities, large and small, have access to university resources. And yet, most governments do not effectively cultivate those partnerships. Government has a lot to offer, including access to data, access to impact, and amplification. Researchers want these things, but the logistics of partnerships are not straightforward. Government needs to think beyond the Request for Proposals (RFP) to achieve real and lasting partnerships with universities.

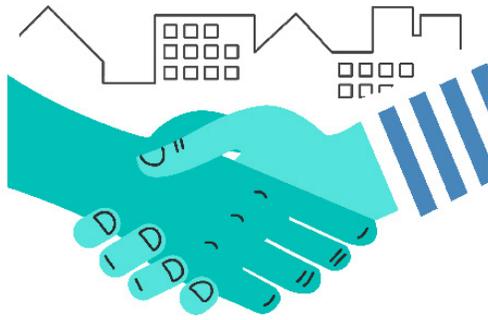


Figure 19: Civic projects gain more momentum and progress when universities and cities work together.

## THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

Government can gain a lot through collaboration with university partners.

Consider developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that spells out the value that each partner brings to the table.

## Case Study: Baltimore

Many of Baltimore's poorest neighborhoods are composed of a significant percentage of people recently released from prison. There are insufficient services to meet the needs of this population, and there is insufficient communication about available services. The goal for the City Accelerator project in Baltimore was to repair the interface between reentering citizens and government.

The project emphasized inclusion through a series of focus groups with those who had recently reentered Baltimore's neighborhoods in the last 90 days. These focus groups sought to understand current gaps and potential solutions in communication by asking how people came to find out about the resources and services available to them, such as housing, healthcare, and employment. These conversations revealed that many formerly incarcerated people were unaware of the various reentry services available across the city, and the majority of individuals who did know, learned about them through word-of-mouth. Acting on this information, the city employed returning citizens to help co-develop solutions to fill this critical information gap. Through a Design Day approach (also used in the New Orleans and Albuquerque projects), Baltimore developed an online mobile advocacy site, [Here 4 Reentry](#), for reentering citizens to learn about, share and evaluate all available resources.

Here 4 Reentry won top prize at the Kaiser Permanente Social Innovation Challenge and was accepted into their exclusive social tech incubator program. Inspired by the community-based participatory research approach and eager to support the longevity of this work, the Baltimore Health Department has also welcomed Here 4 Reentry into their new TECHhealth initiative. As with all public engagement projects, there were significant hurdles. The



team underwent leadership change three times over the course of one year. Had the project not been championed ultimately by the final team leader, it may not have succeeded to nearly the same degree. In this way, Baltimore's story represents how vital leadership is for the work of public engagement. It can't be done without the passion of leaders driving it.

Figure 21: The community reintegration group at Design Day was passionate about strengthening the returning citizen community to represent themselves and fight stigma. "Nothing about us without us!"



Figure 20: Facilitators from the three working groups check in with each other. ©Karen Elliott Greisdorf Photography, 2015



The community of returning citizens in Baltimore was strengthened through the co-design process for the Here 4 Reentry network. Project members participated in Design Days, focus groups, and public events to solicit feedback and spread the word.

## Communication Systems

“Take a look around, then, and see that none of the uninitiated are listening. Now by the uninitiated I mean the people who believe in nothing but what they can grasp in their hands, and who will not allow that action or generation or anything invisible can have real existence.”

—Plato, *Theaetetus*

Listening requires attention to what is said and what is unsaid. It is not simply taking things in, but taking the time to understand who is speaking and how to respond. For government, this means building into every engagement process a deliberate mechanism of thoughtful communication, composed of two interrelated parts: **speaking** and **listening**. When either or both of these parts is unclear or ineffective, the system breaks down. And when any change is made to the system at any level, all other levels are impacted.<sup>13</sup> As such, it is government’s responsibility to invest in both parts of the system—one cannot listen if the other is unable to articulate their voice. And one feels no desire to speak if the other is incapable or unwilling to listen.

### SPEAKING

The process of a group of people articulating a coherent position is never straightforward. This is what makes communities so complicated. *All communities are imagined*. They are constructs that people create together for the purpose of narrative clarity. This doesn’t mean they’re not real or that they don’t have

emotional significance, it only means that **every community is bounded by a changing collective story**. The historian Benedict Anderson identified the “nation” as an imagined community emerging in the 19th century that came together through media such as newspapers and then radio, and was reinforced through political discourse and everyday conversations.<sup>14</sup> But this works on a

“Every community is bounded by a changing collective story.”

smaller scale as well. Every group of people comprised of a number greater than the *Dunbar number* (which is the suggested cognitive limit of the number of social

relations one can reasonably keep in their head), is a narrative construct, an imagined group of people. The block, the neighborhood, the ethnic identity, one’s (non-geographically bound) Facebook friends—these are all imagined communities with whom government is trying to communicate. So when we talk about engaging communities, we are talking about government positioning itself as a willing listener to the myriad ways in which communities express and identify themselves. In fact, it is the responsibility of government to enable that every community have equal access and capacity to express themselves.

<sup>13</sup> Le Dantec, Christopher. 2012. “Participation and Publics: Supporting Community Engagement.” In *Computer Human Interaction*. files/2798/2012 Le Dantec.pdf.

<sup>14</sup> Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.

## Communication Channels

CHANNEL	DESCRIPTION
Community organizations	The official organizations or groups that represent the whole or parts of the community. This includes neighborhood associations, community development corporations, advocacy organizations, etc. Their job is to amplify a representation of a community that is imaginable.
Neighborhood leaders	The individual activists that may or may not be part of community organizations. These people have significant influence on the narrative that comes to define any community.
Broadcast media representations	The external representations of the community, including print, television, radio, or any broad depiction of a community or condition. It's important to understand that these representations are often not created internally, and they may or may not be desirable representations inside the community.
Social media representations	The online conversations on social media platforms that may or may not emerge from within the community. They likely involve people from geographically diverse areas. That said, these conversations typically favor youth voices, and they are valuable, emergent narratives of any community.
Everyday conversations	The conversations that happen everyday in cafes, front porches, sidewalks, schools, etc. This is where narratives get amplified, consolidated, and perpetuated.

Figure 23: Sources and their descriptions through which constituents exchange information.

The above table represents just some of the channels in which communities are imagined. What's common across channels is the use of story and the need for compelling narrative to create collective, community identities. Story creation is not a static and linear process. As the acclaimed French filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard said, "A story should have a beginning, middle and end, but not necessarily in that order." This applies directly to local communities as they find ways to represent themselves, for the purpose of advocating for

local causes, or more generally, for the purpose of inclusion and justice. Understanding how and why communities tell stories is foundational to good listening.

But there are barriers that interfere with effective storytelling. While government needs to understand what makes a good story and how people are telling them, it also needs to understand the social and structural barriers people face every day as they try to tell their stories. Some examples include:

## Interpersonal and Societal Barriers

BARRIER	DESCRIPTION
Personal	People are comfortable in different situations. Some feel comfortable standing up and speaking in front of a crowd at a town hall meeting, while others wouldn't dream of doing that. Some are available for a weeknight meeting, while others have other work or personal obligations, or just wouldn't prioritize going to a meeting.
Racism, sexism, ageism, classism	Every community is impacted by some bias and exclusion. In fact, all communities are exclusive. Political boundaries define neighborhoods, cities, nations; physical or cultural characteristics define sub-cultures, ethnicities. The challenge is to be aware of explicit exclusion and implicit bias, and take measures to recognize them and in some cases act to correct them. Cultural critic bell hooks put it this way: "To build community requires vigilant awareness of the work we must continually do to undermine all the socialization that leads us to behave in ways that perpetuate domination." <sup>15</sup>
Reduced access to media representations (lack of social capital)	Poor neighborhoods are covered by the media to highlight violence, rarely to highlight progress and innovation. It is important to recognize media bias in how, when, and why communities represent themselves.
Reduced access to technology	Mobile phone penetration in the US is extremely high (64% of Americans own smartphones). According to the Pew Research Center, 10% of Americans own a smartphone and do not have access to broadband in their homes. Aaron Smith writes, "Those with relatively low income and educational attainment levels, younger adults, and non-whites are especially likely to be 'smartphone-dependent.'" <sup>16</sup> This is an important consideration when trying to understand appropriate channels for communication.
Reduced access to government services	Accessing government services at City Hall or online can be restricted based on time, transportation, or technology.

<sup>15</sup> hooks, bell. 2003. Teaching community: a pedagogy of hope. New York: Routledge.

<sup>16</sup> Smith, Aaron. 2015. "US Smartphone Use in 2015" Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/01/us-smartphone-use-in-2015/>

Figure 24: Barriers to community and individual expression for public engagement.

When thinking about the challenge of enabling and recognizing a cross section of community voices, government needs to consider the available channels to generate high levels of interest as well as ways to overcome the social and structural barriers that impede citizen participation. In addition, government should understand its role as power broker and strategically amplify community voices when appropriate. Ariel White, former 504HealthNet Project Coordinator, explains how since the voice of the government carries authority and power, it can create momentum and sense of urgency needed to generate attention, action and change: “Without the local support of the main power structure, it’s really difficult to get anything done. Direct messaging from an organization that is respected like the Health Department, or one that has a big platform, like the Mayor, really makes a difference.” Yet, understanding where voices are emerging, and what’s impeding their potential vocalization, may be challenging. For instance, sociological, economic, and psychological variables may all come into play and interact with one another to operate as barriers. Thus, understanding what and where voices are synchronized or disharmonized is probably the most difficult part of calibrating the instruments for public engagement. Moreover, acting as a power broker to amplify voices requires absolute transparency in motiva-

tion and process to ensure fairness and accountability. Implicit in the inclusion of more voices in civic affairs is also networking and collaboration. Oliver Wise, Director of the Office of Performance and Accountability in New Orleans, emphasized how engaging a broad diversity of the community has created new opportunities to foster social ties among marginalized communities, which then increased their capacity to accomplish tasks and goals: “The Mayor urges us to link, leverage, and facilitate. Each one of our groups has its value-add, but not one group could do this work by itself.” As such, voice is also about connecting people to one another, and to their communities, as they exchange information and work together. It is also about leveraging resources to amplify the needs and abilities of underrepresented groups, and facilitating feedback, response, and accountability to community needs and input. On this note, it is important to pay people for their time when the resources exist. If you’re asking someone to take time out of their day, consider compensating them for their time. This can make all the difference in a project and in level of commitment. Only when people are treated fairly, and voice is the reflection of growth of leadership at different levels, can the government truly listen in an intentional way that enables two-way learning and empowerment.

## THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

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Government needs to invest in providing opportunities for citizen input and feedback.

Government should be aware of the various channels constituents use to communicate and exchange information.

Government can strategically amplify marginalized voices and leverage storytelling for social change by identifying and addressing the systemic barriers that many constituents face, and acting as a broker to foster social ties in the process.

## LISTENING

Empowering communities to form, express, and retain voice is essential. But if government doesn't listen to that voice, it can often lack the power to move from vision to results. In the process of listening, Chris LeDantec from the City of Atlanta reflected on the power of simply acknowledging existing community conversations and activities that can further spur and sustain modes of engagement: "Government should amplify the work that's already happening within the



Figure 25: Government must both demonstrate that it's listening and listen authentically to its constituents to build trust.

community instead of trying to either recreate it or even overthink it. And part of that is building good faith. For example, there's a community newspaper that we're working on with a group of people to help re-

animate, which served a really important function in the overall engagement equation or ecosystem. Maybe we previously tried to get our bearings in a way that obscured some of these obvious insights."

Like many other large institutions, government isn't very good at listening. Usually this isn't because it doesn't want to take constituent input under consideration, but because its political and technological structures are not adequately designed to do so. Frank Mirabal with the City of Albuquerque highlighted this point when describing the City's poor listening skills: "[There is] no feedback loop present to engage the community and get their opinions on what might work for them. That paradigm shift has slowly started to happen."

Still, even if the importance of listening gains more of the limelight, the capacity of organizations to effectively do so is being challenged.

This is especially true in the wake of changing digital technologies and social realities. As traditional community input is changing from a few voices in a high school gymnasium to thousands of voices online, most government units simply don't know how to make sense of this new data windfall. What's more, because data is increasingly taking digital form and recorded and archived online, there is a renewed pressure on government to be transparent in the process of listening.

Indeed, listening to dozens of voices is different than listening to thousands of voices, in the way information is taken in, processed, and exchanged. Listening to a group of people in a room requires different technology and different capacity than listening to tweets with a common hashtag. What listening in both situations has in common, however, is the need to acknowledge that a voice was heard and that the voice had substance. For example, when two people are speaking to each other in the same room, the listener will often make eye contact, nod, or use some other verbal cue like "uh huh, or "yeah" as the speaker is speaking. Then, if all goes well, the listener will respond to the substance of what was said. Likewise, **when government sets out to listen, it needs to do two things: 1) demonstrate that it is listening, and then 2) provide feedback that that was indeed the case. Both are matters of designing good user experience (UX).** Whether designing a public meeting or software, government needs to consider all the places where feedback happens.

There are many ways that government can show that it is listening. But each situation is going to be different, depending on the nature of the community and the technologies / processes involved. In every case, it is important to be aware of how the speaker receives immediate feedback. Here are some tips in both face-to-face and online settings.

## Online and Offline Tactics for Listening

FACE-TO-FACE	ONLINE
Show that notes are being taken and then share with participants afterwards.	Create archives of civic data. Many cities have open data portals, in addition to national efforts such as the <a href="#">National Neighborhood Indicators Project</a> . Data accessibility is the first step to making data useful.
Consider setting up chairs in a circle, so participants can see each other.	Create clear feedback mechanisms in digital communication channels that simply acknowledge that an action was taken. Whether a comment, a click, or a like, the system needs to be responsive, otherwise the action feels meaningless.
Provide a range of methods for people to express themselves, from plenary conversation, to group report-backs, and sticky notes.	Have an unobtrusive presence on social media. Provide useful information so that people feel comfortable following you or joining groups.
Frame meetings as problem-solving sessions, where people collaborate towards some clearly defined goal.	Take time to visualize large data sets. Clear, thoughtful data visualizations communicate that data is being acknowledged.
Invest in translators for the three most commonly spoken languages.	<a href="#">Use plain language</a> (See similar tips and resources on the website of the US government digital services consultancy 18F).

Figure 26: Examples of supporting listening authentically to constituents both online and in person.

The above table provides a sample of methods for the performance of listening. There are two things worth noting here. First, the performance of listening does not mean disingenuous listening. Performance is part of even the most genuine process. Second, action needs to be taken to respond to and verify that listening has happened. In interpersonal conversation, after a series of “uh huhs,” it may also be necessary to respond in a way that demonstrates that the information was received AND processed. In public engagement, this could take many forms, from the summary email to the presentation at the end of a meeting. Online it could take the form of regular updates on social media, and offline, it could mean starting each successive meeting with updates from the previous one.



The most important outcome of listening is building trust. Listening only works when people trust that you are listening. The New Orleans Project Coordinator Ariel White reflected on trust-building as one of the top take-aways from the City’s engagement work so far, “[From all of our interventions], it’s really about building trust. Having somebody who’s dedicated to responding to the public, was really important. That was really a crucial aspect of it because that allows the engagee to sort of be on their own time and their own schedule, which will lead to higher rates of important and meaningful engagement.” Simply performing listening without providing clear and convincing evidence that the information was assimilated and processed, leads to distrust and eventually anger.

### *Providing Feedback to Constituents*

FACE-TO-FACE	ONLINE
Begin each meeting with updates from previous meetings.	Send out regular summary emails detailing input from multiple channels.
Pass out or displaying data visualizations of past input.	Provide regular social media updates about previous input.
Document and share where meetings have already occurred and their major takeaways.	Respond to as many individual contributors online as possible.
Hold community-led house parties, with city participation.	Have local forums with trusted neighborhood liaisons

Figure 27: Examples of online and in-person tactics for sharing feedback during public engagement projects.

## LISTENING AUTHENTICALLY

If acting in good faith, authentic listening is the most important aspect of effective co-production. Institutions, especially large and powerful ones such as government, are like machines that need to represent a convincing human face. Consider the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Computer scientist Alan Turing devised something called the Turing Test, which is a test to determine whether or not humans could distinguish between talking to a human or a machine.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, machines often lack the emotional intelligence needed to convince people that they are speaking to a real person. The element of humanness in communication is not only about rational outputs, but also about the emotions and feelings that bring value to the conversation.

So instead of coming up with hard mea-

sures for effective listening, it is useful to think about a **Turing Test for government**. What are the subjective and emotional influences on whether and how people feel listened to? Just as Turing tested machine intelligence by measuring human subjects' beliefs in the humanness of a conversa-

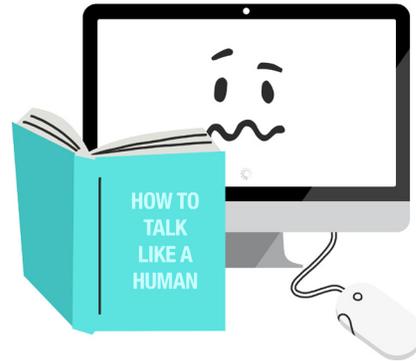


Figure 28: The “Turing Test” to demonstrate that real people are responding to people’s public engagement needs

tion partner, so should government define its ability to govern by measuring citizens’ belief in the humanness of government. Government, when operating in good faith and in the spirit of co-production, needs to take every measure to perform, and to make good, on listening to constituents.

Government should consider itself a host and conversation partner, with the responsibility to be responsive and perform effective listening so that communities can equitably imagine themselves and continuously articulate their stories through accessible channels of communication.

<sup>17</sup> Turing, A.M. (1950). Computing machinery and intelligence. *Mind*, 59, 433-460.

## THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

Governments can demonstrate their capacity to listen by acknowledging citizen input.

Depending on the channels communities use to communicate, government should invest in the “performance of listening” by providing appropriate feedback.

Prioritizing good listening and mode of responding builds trust, which is the foundation of public engagement.

## Case Study: Seattle

In Seattle, lack of communication between city departments about their own outreach efforts to local neighborhoods resulted in the same neighborhoods being contacted repeatedly by different departments. Eventually, these neighborhoods viewed this as a lack of listening and began to lose trust in the engagement process itself. The goal for the City Accelerator project in Seattle, therefore, was to create an internal system to better enable communication across its various departments so that offices can collaborate on their outreach and engagement efforts. It also sought to build upon prior interactions for more meaningful relationships.

To that end, Seattle's team created a central pipeline of communication for its nearly forty city offices and departments to coordinate internally across engagement efforts, approaches, and evaluation practices. In addition, a simple checklist is now filled out before and after every engagement experience with every City department. This checklist also provides a basic means of reporting back to communities about what they've heard, how they are responding, and what relevant issues remain to be discussed.

The work of archiving and cataloging conversations with citizens has helped to frame public engagement as a continuous conversation, rather than a one-way mechanism for relaying information. By improving inter-departmental communication, the City of Seattle has improved their relationships with local neighborhoods, too. As a result, Seattle has seen increased participation numbers in public engagement.



Figures 29 and 30: City Scoop in Rainier Valley Event that included an opportunity for citizens to provide feedback for city activities while eating ice-cream. Photo Credit: Robert Wade





Seattle improved their public meetings by consolidating the outreach efforts of different departments and standardizing the process to include translators, captured notes, and interactive exercises. Photos from the City Scoop event, featuring input collection and ice cream, were taken by Robert Wade.



## How to Think About Technology

Technology is any tool that assists in the completion of a task. A pen is technology for writing on paper, and social media is technology for sharing cat videos (or, perhaps connecting with others who are interested in cats). In any case, it is important to understand that technology is simply a tool to get things done. It is not always digital. This understanding makes for more deliberate decision-making about all the technologies used in a project. Too often, government teams think hard about whether or not to use digital technologies, but don't think twice about chairs, pens, rooms, books, etc. When technology is considered broadly, it forces you to consider all the various mechanisms used to get things done.

At the beginning of a process, just as it is important to identify precisely what tasks you want to accomplish, it is equally important to lay out precisely what technologies you want to employ. Sometimes that will mean setting up

a Facebook page or building a new website; and other times it will mean bringing sticky notes, markers, and flip charts to a meeting. By being upfront about what technologies are used and why, it will help adjust expectations of their use and set realistic goals. It will also help designers make

conscious decisions about even "small technologies" such as fliers, placement of chairs in a room, Twitter campaigns, etc. and not let "big technologies" steal all the attention. According to Ariel White in New Orleans, digital technologies

are "...not a replacement for the one-on-one connections or for showing up. [Technology] is not a replacement for having open policies...it's like the [improvisational] 'yes and.'" Digital and non-digital technology is an addition to analog and human interaction that can help remind and nudge people about what they can do and what the engagement process can look like. There's a place for technology but it's not everything.

**"It is important to understand that technology is simply a tool to get things done."**

---

### THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

Technologies are tools that get things done  
- from office supplies and fliers to social  
media and mobile apps.

Digital technologies can supplement, but  
never replace, offline engagement efforts.

# BALTIMORE CITY RE★ENTRY DESIGN&DATA DAY

IMPACT HUB BALTIMORE  
10 E. NORTH AVENUE

EVENT TIME  
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20TH  
9:00AM - 5:30PM

REGISTRATION & LIGHT BREAKFAST  
9:15AM

OPENING REMARKS  
10:00AM

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT  
INFO@MISSION-LAUNCH.COM

REG: REENTRYDESIGNDATA.EVENTBRITE.COM

## #REBUILDINGREENTRY

 @MISSION\_LAUNCH

 /MISSIONLAUNCH

 MISSIONLAUNCH

Figure 31: The City of Baltimore plans a Design Day to bring together technologists and returning citizens to co-design digital approaches to support re-entry.

## Case Study: Albuquerque

With a population that is minority-majority and an increasing number of immigrants eager to enter the workforce, Albuquerque represents the near future of every American city. The goal of the City Accelerator project in Albuquerque was to support immigrant entrepreneurs by improving access and ease of business development services.

In an effort to assure full participation in the economy, the Mayor's Office had been eager to hear from small business owners through what they have called "small business deep dives." These intimate conversations between immigrant service providers and the Mayor with his staff have been fruitful in uncovering complex issues related to the needs, priorities, and challenges of both parties. The Albuquerque team then implemented "Design Days" organized and attended by stakeholders to co-design tools and practices that support these immigrant entrepreneurs. The benefits of this participatory approach are twofold: trust is built between the constituents and the government through a transparent process, and there is more trust by not making false assumptions about one another's needs and viewpoints.

Through the extended process of both the "small business deep dives" and the Design Days, the City of Albuquerque has also had opportunities to share prototypes with the community to demonstrate a feedback loop during iterative technology development. To this end, the city team prioritized building capacity for co-designing future civic technology projects.

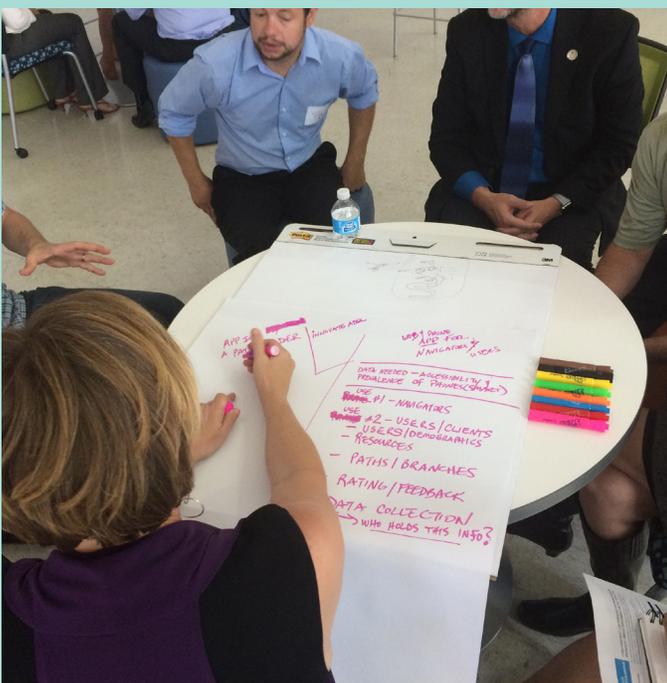
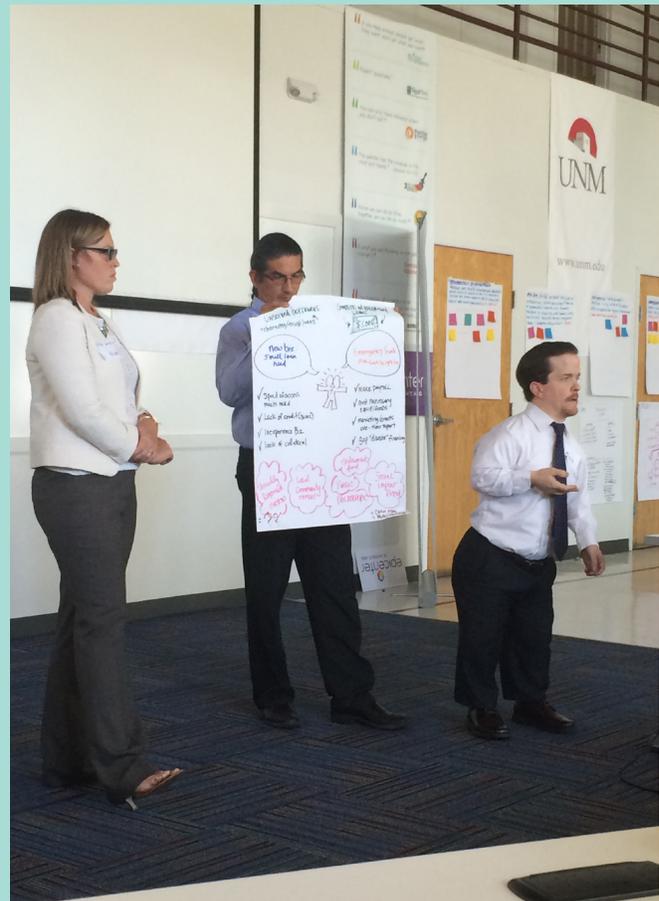
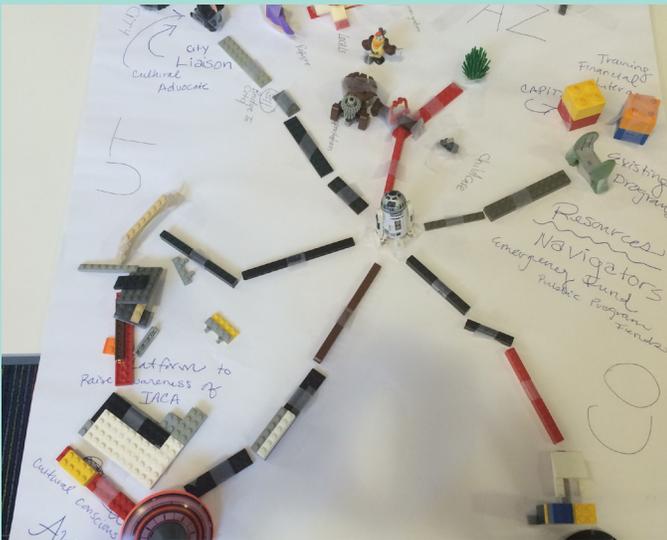
Moving forward, this project will gain more visibility through the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs and the Economic Development Department. To date, the team has engaged over 70 services providers and immigrant entrepreneurs through six design sessions across the city. Through the feedback from immigrant entrepreneurs, the "logic" of utilizing available services is now baked into the design of the platform, because it was informed by end users.



Figure 32: Pop Fizz is an ice-cream and soda shop owned by immigrant entrepreneurs in Albuquerque, NM.



Figure 33: The networking event Taza engages Spanish-speaking entrepreneurs on small business development.



Albuquerque focused on how immigrant-entrepreneurs play a critical role in the local economy. Service providers and entrepreneurs contribute their insight on the gaps in resources and opportunities for support. Focus groups, design days, and networking events were organized.



# Charting the Course

Now that instruments are calibrated, you should be ready to start making your map. The map metaphor is particularly useful in this section as it explores identifying where you want to go and how you're going to get there. And importantly, it explains how you're going to talk to people about your trip when it's all said and done.

There are many ways of evaluating a project, from hiring a professional external evaluator, collaborating with a university researcher, or simply documenting and measuring a process. Unfortunately, even though there is an increasing amount of pressure to represent outcomes of public engagement, and there are many research organizations devoted to evaluation, there are typically no additional resources available. But there are ways of identifying and measuring value that can be meaningful for hitting internal metrics of quality assurance as well as communicating with the public in the all important feedback loop discussed above.

## *Drawing the Roadmap*

The first thing to do when starting a new public engagement project in government is to consider your goals, objectives and where you want to end up (i.e. getting input into policy, building support to empower underrepresented communities, etc.). The next step is locating where you are currently, and then, of course, how you want to get to your destination.

Determining your route is essential. While many of us have become dependent on algorithmic mapping, where Google simply spits out the most efficient way of getting to our destination,

in public engagement, the experience and reflection of the route is absolutely essential. Charting your course towards public engagement should include meaningful stops along the way, landmarks that will allow you to take stock of your progress and perhaps reassess how you want to get to your destination.

The next several sections are meant to help you fill out the roadmap. The roadmap should be printed and hung in a prominent location and used as a reminder of your destination and how you're going to get there.

## Public Engagement Goals and their Impacts

PROJECT GOAL	ROUTE (Method)	IMPACT (Inform, Consult, Involve, Empower)
<i>Master plan of city neighborhood</i>	<i>Town Hall Meetings</i>	<i>Inform, Consult</i>
Data collection on use of busy street corner	Sensors placed within street furniture and street lights to measure pedestrian use patterns.	Inform
Encourage people to invest in the health and wellness of their communities	Appoint health ambassadors that can work with people in accessing and using health care	Inform, consult, Involve, empower

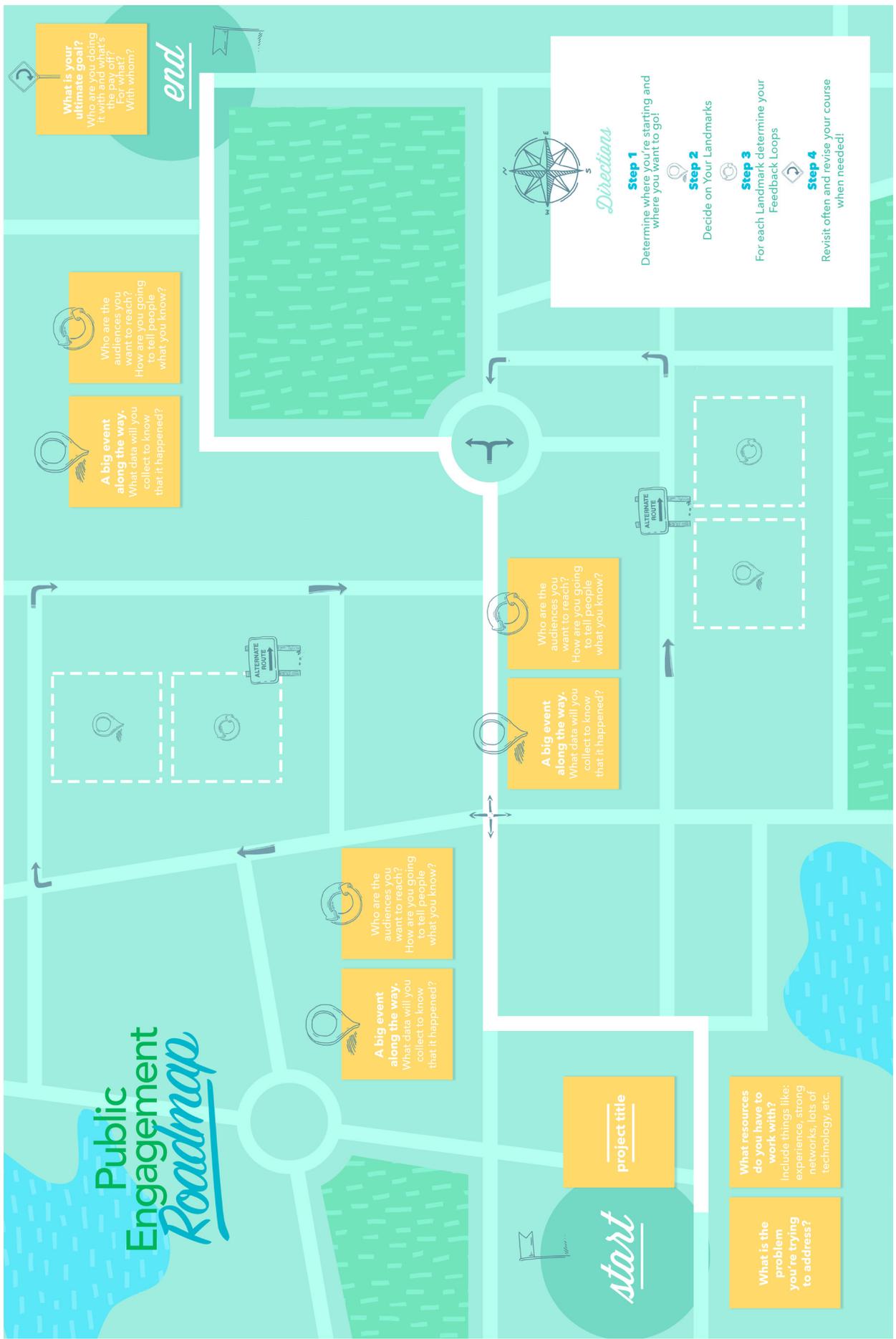
Figure 34: Mapping project goals with their methods and intended impacts

Opposite page: Figure 35: Public Engagement Roadmap to be used for project planning

### THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

Engagement is not linear. It's important to have a map in front of you. Too often, people get lost in the details of public engagement and lose sight of the larger goals.

# Public Engagement Roadmap



## *Destination and Landmarks*

Your destination is where you want to go. In public engagement projects, this isn't always that easy to identify. It is easy to conflate the policy or service delivery goals (i.e. create new affordable housing policies in the city or craft better ways of delivering primary care to residents) with the engagement destination (i.e. effectively enable voice and listen to communities or empower communities to identify useful services relevant to their needs). While policy and service delivery should always be the backdrop for engagement, it is imperative that public engagement is treated separately and considered carefully.

The best way to achieve this is by mapping not only destinations (i.e. co-produced policy) but landmarks (i.e. enhanced attention to local events, increased responsiveness to debates discussed on online forums, etc.). In traditional evaluation processes, outcomes are documented in what's called a "logic model" and they're described as short-term, intermediate term, and long-term. The objective of a logic model is to map particular activities to their desired outcomes at various stages of a pro-

cess. This can be a useful exercise, but it tends to be very linear in orientation - one activity leads to one outcome, which leads to another outcome, and so on. In the world of public engagement, things are rarely so linear or logical. A roadmap (think of the paper fold-out kind) shows how things connect and suggests multiple ways to get from point A to point B.

Landmarks are clarifying sites that help you understand that you're making progress towards your destination. They should be understood as things along the way, but they don't need to provide direct access to the destination. The most important thing about landmarks is that someone, somehow, identified them as important and placed them on the map. It is, of course, important to consider the kind of process you are adopting, and the kinds of tools you are deploying (See Figure 44). Ideally, identifying landmarks happens at the beginning of a project to help you know where you're going, to help you talk about the journey, and to help others reproduce the route in future engagement projects.

### THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

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Plan a course. Articulate your destination and identify at least three landmarks along the way. Landmarks should factor in resources and time required to accomplish them.

Identify your starting location. What are the current conditions? What is your current budget and deadline, if any? State the problem.

Landmarks do not need to provide direct access to your destination; sometimes you drive out of your way to see something, and those are the most meaningful parts of a trip.

## Feedback

Now that you have a map, filled with landmarks, you have to figure out how you know you're making progress towards your destination. What kind of data can you collect and how do you make sense of it? (These are the feedback loop spaces on the map) In public engagement work, the landmarks are often nebulous. You're looking for changes in attitudes, increases in the amount and kind of attention paid to a topic, participation in events, specific online actions (i.e. retweets, likes, etc.), the quality of stories told, and the list goes on. So how do you identify what's important?

Even though you set out with good intentions to measure what's important, often reality gets inverted, and you start to think only that which is measurable is important. It's good to recognize this bias early on in order to correct for it. Once you've done that, you can figure out how to make sense of it all.

Start with your destination and work backwards to all the places you'll have to pass through before you get there. For example, in order to accomplish a change in policy, you have to generate greater attention to the topic that can lead to an increase in social media activity about

the topic, high-level influencers talking about the topic, and perhaps an increase in people attending related events. Once you have these things identified (in no particular order), then start to think about metrics. Are there things you can count? Do you have the tools you need to count them? If not, can you get them?

If there is nothing to count, is there something to describe? Have the quality or style of images people are using in online conversations changed? How do you know? Are more people showing up to meetings? Are meeting organizers describing their process more clearly? Are communities using the resources you've made available to them?

In addition to the things you can count and describe, can you create opportunities for more feedback? That is, if one of your landmarks is a change in people's attitude about a topic, can you ask people questions? Can you circulate a survey online? Can you distribute a paper survey? If so, what kinds of questions will you ask to gain insight on people's attitudes?

The key is to define the landmark and then figure out how you will describe it.

### THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

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Metrics matter. With each landmark on your map, determine how you're going to measure progress towards reaching it. Does the data exist? Will you have to make it?

There are many ways to see the landscape. Consider all mechanisms for collecting data, including online and paper surveys, interviews, or online metrics (i.e. Google analytics).

Don't wait until the end to analyze your data. You should be narrativizing and evaluating your data throughout a process.

## Coming to Terms with Failures

A runaway success in public engagement is difficult to achieve. You're likely not going to achieve 100 percent buy-in or remove all structural barriers to participation. Whatever process you choose may not always be accessible or available for some people, and at worst, it may alienate others. For this reason, it is even more important to measure progress towards landmarks and not be concerned with only reaching your destination. Even if you fail to get to your destination, there are always places along the way you successfully reach. Understanding this is important not

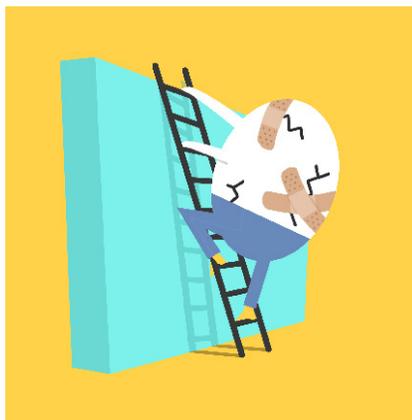


Figure 36: Coming to terms with failures is part of the public engagement planning process.

<sup>18</sup> Cooperrider, D., & Sekerka, L. E. (2006). Toward a theory of positive organizational change. In Joan V. Gallos (Ed.), *Organization Development: A Jossey-Bass Reader*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons

only for the project you're working on but for the potential success of all the projects that will come after yours.

This idea of landmarks builds off the study and method of systemic organizational change called "appreciative inquiry,"<sup>18</sup> which sets out to

build constructive pathways, not diagnostic results, from evaluation. In public engagement work, the only appropriate description of failure is when it describes a lack of productivity and inability to deliver. But even then, failure is rarely total or catastrophic.

If a project fails to reach its destination, it likely accomplished something along the way and through important landmarks. This is why, outside of outcomes evaluation, it is important to describe landmarks in detail and to put them in the context of systemic change. And if you failed to reach a landmark or got completely off track to-

wards your destination, then use this occurrence as an opportunity to explain what happened and how you might be able to prevent it in the future. Remember, public participation work is iterative. It's not about the destination, but about improving and learning from the journey.

### THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

Reframe failure in terms of appreciative inquiry by considering failure as an opportunity to learn and surface useful information for future iterations. Failures should be small, cheap, and temporary. Often burnout can be mistaken for failure.

Document process. In what ways can failure to reach a landmark translate into lessons learned? Documenting failures actually produces additional value, and may even have a bigger impact than immediate success.

## Identifying Value

Value is an illusive thing. While the value of achieving the goal of the project may be clear, the value of the individual outcomes, or landmarks, are less clear.

So who cares that people are paying more attention to a particular topic? Who cares that more people are attending events? The answer is, people care for different reasons, and that should be captured in your process. Creating a bigger Facebook following, for example, may not only have value for the project and its goals but also for government by building capacity and support for future projects. And while more creative use of social media has value for the project, it also can motivate participants to care about what they're doing, build social networks, and make them feel more empowered to address community-wide concerns.

Part of what it means to effectively identify the value of a project is to consider the motivations and rewards for every person involved, from deci-

**"The best approach is to keep landmarks flexible and understand that they may increase or decrease in value as you talk to more people and gain a deeper understanding of their motivations."**

sion-makers to supporters and staff. How does arriving at a particular landmark motivate diverse participants and address their interests, especially

underrepresented individuals or groups?

Often, these things can't be figured out at the beginning of a project, as stakeholders or particular value propositions will inevitably emerge throughout a project. The best approach is to keep landmarks flexible and understand that they may increase or decrease in value as you talk to more people and gain a deeper understanding of their motivations. Remember, you're not making a logic model as there is nothing linear about a public engagement project. You should be able to add and subtract landmarks and their connections to one another throughout a project.



Figure 37: Project coordinators from the City of Baltimore spend time with co-designer returning citizens.

### THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

Clear statements of value and defined outcomes are important to manage expectations of funders and communities.

Communicate value in public reports. This may need to include numbers and goals/outcomes for transparency.

## Documentation

Don't document everything, but document everything you can. Get in the habit of writing stuff down and organizing your documentation. If you can't count it, describe it. Try to explain what's happening, or what your thoughts are, or why someone said what they said. **Impact is 20% evidence and 80% storytelling.** So encourage people to tell stories and then figure out how to record them. Public engage-

**“People engage in them because they care, but more importantly, they care because they've engaged in them.”**

ment processes are affective; they are experiential. People engage in them because they care, but more importantly, they care because they've engaged in them. Capturing this sentiment is not science; it's art, and it requires attentiveness and deep reflection. Make sure that someone on your team can spend the appropriate amount of time doing this work.



Figure 38: Returning citizen leader Sheila Warren



Figure 33: Ideas brainstormed by returning citizens for a resource network.

### THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

Document whenever possible and use rich descriptions to capture nuances and details. Cultivate a spirit of project ethnography throughout the team.

Conduct interviews or focus groups where possible to get more feedback. If there is time available, diaries are a useful tool for tracking findings and insights.

The archive is the raw material of history. It's not just about archiving what's important, but archiving so things can become important.

Process can be an outcome.

## Counting in Context

Numbers matter. People tend to believe them when they see them. While that's great, it can also be a problem. When you count things, you have to be aware of the context in which you're counting. When reporting on participants in an online campaign, there is often an expectation that it happen at the scale of the Internet. In other words, a local campaign online should reach millions, because it can. Of course, sharing cat videos is different than sharing news of a community event. Understanding this difference is key. Describe the context in which people get online, why they would gravitate to this particular campaign, and what kind of actions can be reasonably expected as a result of the campaign.

All participation is not equal. Liking something online is different than commenting on something. And commenting on something is different than creating and sharing something.

Likewise, attending a meeting is different than attending a block party or writing to your representative. It's important to understand not just what platforms people are using to participate, but the quality of interactions taking place in those platforms. Depending on your landmarks, discussion may be more valuable than transactions. Make sure this is clear at the outset.

Communication is complicated. In any given conversation, there might be humor, sarcasm, hostility, or love. Understanding a range of responses that result from engaging in public process is key. You can gain deeper insight by looking closely at individual contributions or by talking to people and asking them about their motivations. Remember, every story you get from someone is part of the overall story you need to tell about your project.

### THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

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Identify things that are countable.

It is equally important to understand that the same number can mean vastly different things in different contexts.

Put effort into marketing and spreading your message. Just because actions take place online does not mean that they occur at the "scale of the Internet." In other words, you don't have to reach one million people for online engagements to be effective.

Discussion is more valuable than statements. Replies and comments can say more than lone posts. Look for sentiment, emotion, and counter narratives.

Meaningful action is about relationships, not transactions.

Consider the motivation of the user/community. Recognize the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Paying someone to participate may not be as meaningful as self-motivated participation.

Recognize barriers to participation and use them to define the value of action.

## Engagement Modalities

There is no shortage of strategies for creating effective co-production processes in government. The goal is to find the right technology and method that creates a communication system that both enables voices and facilitates listening. Below is a number of engagement modalities<sup>19</sup> you can consider deploying. Each has its own affordances

and weaknesses and is best applied in specific circumstances. When designing public engagement processes, it is important to understand a range of possible methods and choose the one that is most appropriate to help you reach your destination. Review example projects for each modality in Appendix 4.

Figure 40 (below): Explanations, examples, and government applications of methods for public engagement.

<sup>19</sup> Learn more about civic media approaches in *Civic Media: Technology, Design, Practice* by Eric Gordon and Paul Mihailidis (MIT Press, 2016) and [www.civicmediaproject.org](http://www.civicmediaproject.org)

## Public Engagement Modalities

MODALITY	DESCRIPTION	APPLICABILITY
<b>Data Literacy</b>	The skills and knowledge needed to use and access data to enable inclusive public engagement	Government can take an active role as an aggregator of big data in supporting an informed citizenry. Creating data visualizations, opening data sets, and facilitating data literacy workshops are all ways government can engage through information-sharing.
<b>Design Thinking</b>	Design-thinking is a participatory, and problem-based approach involving experimentation and testing.	Cities can plan a variety of creative engagement activities that encourage ideation, such as design charrettes, game play, art festivals, and hackathons or design days.
<b>Face-to-face</b>	Face-to-face methods are opportunities for meaningful learning, connection, and dialogue to build trust and relationships.	Face-to-face methods include town hall meetings, community workshops, ambassador programs, leadership trainings, community liaison opportunities, steering committees, clubs, affinity groups, and many more.

MODALITY	DESCRIPTION	APPLICABILITY
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<p><b>Online Deliberation</b></p>	<p>Deliberation is a generative exchange of ideas that can occur in digital spaces such as forums, platforms, and apps.</p>	<p>City governments can invest in digital engagement strategies that allow for meaningful conversations to occur. These tactics include virtual townhalls, Twitter chats, and social media campaigns as well as polls.</p>
<p><b>Play</b></p>	<p>Play is any activity where the means are more valuable than the ends. Play suggests discovery, learning, and exploration.</p>	<p>Play is not about motivating or incentivizing people to do things, but it's about providing the space for learning and interaction. Play can be encouraged through games, interactive displays, meme-inspired social media campaigns, among other tactics.</p>
<p><b>Sensing</b></p>	<p>A "sensor" can be broadly defined as any node of interaction in an environment that collects data and connects to a network.</p>	<p>Governments can explore how to leverage the Internet of Things (IoT) for meaningfully interpreting data from sources such as traffic lights and GPS on municipal busses. For instance, governments can help people deploy sensors for citizen science and hacking projects.</p>
<p><b>Storytelling</b></p>	<p>Any event includes a story. Storytelling is an opportunity to share perspectives, learn from different viewpoints, and consider new ideas.</p>	<p>From public rallies to immersive virtual reality documentaries, government can facilitate storytelling to garner and sustain interest in a topic. For any public engagement process, governments should consider face-to-face and online platforms for people to tell their stories.</p>



# Going Places

Public institutions are struggling for legitimacy. Our moment is defined by a technological shift towards mass production of digital data and increased demand for its production. As a result, consumers of digital data expect and demand transparency and responsiveness from public institutions. This is why there has been such an emphasis on increasing public participation and instantiating community engagement efforts in cities: it's not just because it's the right thing to do, but also a veritable necessity for institutions to weather major technological, social, and cultural changes.

We can understand this moment as being comprised of two opposing forces: on the one hand, an extraordinary bounty of data and the compulsion to create smarter and better analytics for more efficient and responsive institutions, and on the other hand, deep and resounding community connections, rising of oppositional voices (i.e. Black Lives Matter, Occupy Wall Street, etc.), and people-centered processes. As a result, cities and towns in the United States have been grappling with the demand for increased technological efficiency and transparency, just as they have been

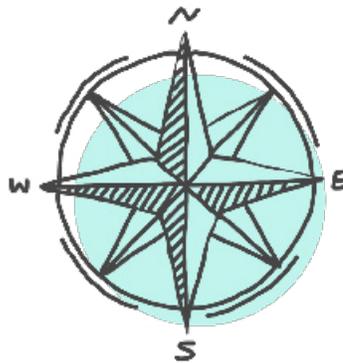
struggling to make institutions “more human,” “more relatable,” and “more meaningfully inefficient.”

But here's the problem: the institutional language of engagement has been defined by its measurement: chief engagement officers in corporations are measuring milliseconds on web pages, and clicks on ads, and not relations among people.

This disproportionately influences the values of democracy and the responsibility of public institutions to protect them. Too often, when government talks about engagement, it talks about measurable things without providing clear definitions on how to quantify them. It often provides ambiguous mandates

to employees and departments are rewarded for quantifiable efficiency, not relationships. The fundamental truth won't change just because something is called “engagement.”

This document is informed by the work of teams in five cities: Atlanta, Albuquerque, Baltimore, New Orleans, and Seattle. Each of their efforts reflects a tension between the mandate for measurable public engagement, on the one hand, and meaningful relationships on the other. Ulti-



mately, each produced a bit of both: numbers to recount and relationships fostered and nurtured by local government that have the potential for lasting, but likely immeasurable, impact on people. While both of these things matter, chances are any

given department is going to focus on increased efficiency and measurability, while downplaying relation and meaning-making.

At the end of the day, who is going to care about government? How do you get people to care about the services that gov-

ernment provides? How do you get people to care about the health outcomes in their neighborhoods? How do you get people to care about ensuring accessible, high-quality public education? These are the questions that matter. What is laid out in this document is a roadmap to caring. When government talks about civic engagement, it should really be talking about caring.

But let me take it one step further. When someone cares about something, they make a decision to be attentive to that thing. But “caring about” is one end of what we might call a spectrum of caring. On the other end, there is “caring for,” when, as described by philosopher Nel Noddings, “what we do depends not upon rules, or at least not wholly on rules—not upon a prior determination of what is fair or equitable—but upon a constellation of conditions that is viewed through both the eyes of

the one-caring and the eyes of the cared-for.”<sup>19</sup> In short, caring-for is relational. When one cares for another, the outcomes of an encounter are not predetermined, but arise through relation. If government is truly to adopt an ethic that is inclusive and

responsive, it needs to be cautious of the language of engagement, which implies attentiveness, but also, as it is used so commonly in the private sector, a kind of captivity. To engage customers is to grab them, to assimilate them into a system, and make them compliant. In the public

sector, the goal should be to care for communities, and to nurture outcomes based on relations, not pre-conceived ideals. There is a reciprocity that is important to achieve - if government in the American ideal is of the people and for the people, then the challenge of government institutions is to develop programs, services, and opportunities for people to “care for” and feel “cared about” by the people.

This is caring for civics. I mean this in two ways: First, civic life, and the public institutions that mediate it, is in transition. It is going to require organizational and thoughtful leadership to care for it. And there is need to

think beyond engagement as a matter of market efficiency. Second, we need to instantiate a “caring-for” civics. This is an approach to civic life that is fundamentally relational, where public institutions create value systems and metrics that sup-



Figure 34: The community reintegration group at Baltimore’s Design Day was passionate about strengthening the returning citizen community to represent themselves and fight stigma. “Nothing about us without us!” ©Karen Elliott Greisdorf Photography, 2015

**“When government talks about civic engagement, it should really be talking about caring.”**

<sup>19</sup> Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013, p. 12.

port long-term relationship building in addition to short-term attention. If we consider the work of government as operating within this spectrum of caring, from caring-about to caring-for, then we can better understand the tensions presented by our particular moment. It is important that people care about government and their community; it is more important that people care for their communities, where their attention is transformed into responsibility and connection. Caring for civics is the guiding value for 21st century governance.

# Appendix 1

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## *Additional Engagement Guides*

### [Code for America Engagement Toolkit](#)

Author(s): Code for America

This categorized resource guide was created for building transparent and engaging community participation by Code for America. Code for America addresses the growing gap between public and private sectors in their use of technology and design and created this toolkit for the City of Boulder. The guide has step-by-step instructions for setting up engagement processes in the categories of: expanding reach, providing relevant and usable information, using spaces and channels for participation, encouraging productive actions, creating useful feedback loops, and additional recommendations and tools. It includes some measurements, but stops short at analysis. While the guide offers a wide variety of civic technology tools, it does not address the challenges of engagement implementation.

### [Digital Sustainability Conversations: How Local Governments can Engage Residents Online](#)

Author(s): The Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN) Urban Sustainability Innovation (USI)

This user-friendly guide illustrates the business value of digital engagement as well as its risks and legal challenges. Written by a partnership between academics, a sustainability consultancy, and government leaders, this guide further lays out a 16-step process to designing, implementing, and evaluating a digital engagement strategy along with case study examples, historical context with practical steps, assessment worksheets, and tools. The intended audience are City Managers, Mayors, Directors of Sustainability, Communications Directors, Project Managers, and other department heads.

[Engagement Technology for All: Best Practices for Using Technology in Engaging Underrepresented Communities in Planning](#)

Author(s): Place/Matters, the Ford Foundation

This report evaluates different technology tools for engagement that serve strengthening participation in public decision-making. This guide acknowledges how emerging technologies are changing how information is gathered and communicated, which influences the texture of engagement. This guide analyzes a subset of civic technology, which focuses specifically on improving participation in public decision-making, is analyzed in this guide with a focus on outreach to minority and disadvantaged populations. Case studies are highlighted in each of the sections that explain planning processes, relevant platforms, mobile engagement, social media best practices, games, and concluding recommendations. Deployment of civic technology still needs more evaluation, which the guide acknowledges and suggests tips for tracking indicators to begin this process. The guide is well-rounded in its research-based approach, practical suggestions, and awareness of implementation.

[Field Guides to Ensuring Voter Intent](#)

Author(s): The Center for Civic Design

In eight volumes that detail design, writing, testing, and layout instructions for voting ballots, these guides support the process of creating intuitive election materials. This series of field guides is created by the nonprofit The Center for Civic Design and is funded by the MacArthur Foundation as well as 321 backers on Kickstarter. The guides build off of previous work of design recommendations for election assistance by offering simplified and actionable steps.

[IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation](#)

Author(s): International Association of Public Participation (IAP2)

This chart helps scaffold the process for increasing meaningful engagement by addressing the goals, public communication, and example participation techniques. IAP2 is an international organization for knowledge sharing and capacity building of best practices for public participation. This straightforward graphic is based off of the Arnstein's ladder of public participation and includes the categories of: inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower. While this graphic does not provide any practical guidelines, it presents a clear framework for thinking about the work of public participation and can be a useful reference point.

**[Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement Guide - City of Seattle](#)**

Author(s): The Race and Social Justice Initiative in the City of Seattle

This guide to inclusive public engagement was originally developed in 2009 (revised in 2012, with the expressed goal of being “a practical guide and resource for all city staff.”) The Race and Social Justice Initiative aims to ensure racial equity in city programming, work with community-based organizations to end structural racism, and facilitates network-building and partnerships across sectors to address racial disparities. The guide provides a useful checklist for designing and implementing inclusive public engagement processes, and an evaluation guide that helps with identifying evaluative questions for the engagement process. Other resources include strategies for inclusive engagement, a public involvement planning worksheet, and a glossary of terms as well as tools and techniques. This guide is full of helpful graphics, such as the Cultural Competence Continuum and Public Engagement Matrix. The quick guide also provides a summarized overview for this otherwise extensive resource.

**[National Assembly of Wales Public Engagement Toolkit](#)**

Author(s): The National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement

The National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement is a university collaborative across UK with a mission of engaging the public in research and education activities. Of course, with this broad mission, the organization has really branched into a number of different contexts and modalities. Originally called the Beacons Project at its founding in 2007, it has since changed its name to NCCPE in 2011 and continues the work. The website has a framework, toolkits, evaluation techniques, and importantly, a series of case studies. The site structure is organized by defining, planning, and implementing public engagement processes while facilitating cultural change to adopt best practices. The site includes information for ways to stay involved via an annual conference, consulting services, and a newsletter subscription.

**National  
Standards for  
Community  
Engagement**

**Author(s):**The Scottish Community Development Centre

This set of national standards is a means of assuring good public process between communities and agencies. The standards are seen as a fundamental part of community planning while acknowledging the importance of increasing inclusion of minorities and disadvantaged populations. The standards were originally developed in 2005 and have been in wide use in Scotland. The standards address how organizations with a public-interest focus can improve: involvement of stakeholders, overcoming barriers in participation, project planning, methods assessment, team collaboration, information sharing practices, implementing feedback mechanisms, and more. There is a focus on measuring indicators and community-led action research through implementation guidelines are lacking.

**UCL Public  
Engagement  
Toolkit**

**Author(s):** University College of London

This list of toolkits includes checklists for planning and evaluating projects, research methods, design principles, communications resources and more. While the audience is primarily for internal to UCL public engagement, this is a well-rounded resource with research-based models of engagement as well as practical, templated resources to use. The evaluation methods section defines the qualities of evaluation while outlining methods including interviews, creative exercises, and workshops. The research protocol provides practices for optimizing collaboration between citizen groups, academics, and public sector leaders. Users can directly apply checklists and evaluation techniques from this resource while checking the guiding principles and outreach examples for alignment with best practices.

# Appendix 2

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## *City Accelerator Goals*

### **1. Design and implement effective engagement strategies**

Engaging people in the work of government sometimes feels like extra work. Yet, increasingly, it is central to practice. Taking the time to design and implement strategies of engagement that are not simply additive, but transformative, to government practice, is imperative. Prioritizing this work and understanding the best tactics with which to accomplish it, is a primary goal.

### **2. Improve upon existing structures and networks for engagement**

People are already working within established professional and social networks. Promoting co-governance does not require building networks from scratch, but rethinking and repurposing existing networks.

### **3. Evaluate impact and process**

Evaluation is the deliberate assessment of a process. When trying out a new way of working, one should be guided by framing questions and have a clear means of answering them.

### **4. Build a better 'back end' for engagement**

Institutional structures often do not support effective communication. Are departments communicating with each other to assure consistency and fairness of process? Are the mechanisms in place for the institution to be responsive to feedback?

### **5. Tell a good story**

Even when government offices are doing good work, they often don't talk about it. Part of creating an effective communication infrastructure is assuring that governments appropriately self-promote.

### **6. Build muscles for inclusive engagement**

Processes can function smoothly, but if they are not inclusive, they are not functioning well. Government serves everyone in a city. If communication reaches only certain residents, it is not fulfilling its mission. Inclusivity is a muscle that is built up over time as the above five steps are taken.

# Appendix 3

## *Project Implementation Phases*

### **Albuquerque: Supporting Immigrant-Entrepreneurs**

**Phase I implementation:** Understanding the needs via collecting extensive community input with Design Days and Stakeholder Mapping

**Phase II implementation:** Building a digital platform to catalog and improve upon existing resources for immigrant-entrepreneurs

**Modalities Explored:** Co-design, Civic Tech

**Team Members:** Frank Mirabal (Director of Collective Impact, Office of Mayor Richard J. Berry, City of Albuquerque), Jacob Sanchez (I-team Co-Director), Gary Oppedahl (Director, Economic Development Department), and Mabel Gonzalez (Project Manager, City of Albuquerque)

**Fund Allocation:** Phase I: A series of over 70 entrepreneurs in six deep dive sessions over a two month period. In addition, a Design Day engaged over 40 individuals representing 30 service providers. Phase II: The development of a useable interface for immigrant entrepreneurs to effectively navigate City of Albuquerque and community resources.

## Atlanta: Building Trust and Co-Creating Public Service

### Terms of Communication

**Phase I implementation:** Understanding the existing landscape of engagement fatigue and activating network leaders and ambassadors for Phase II

**Phase II implementation:** Synthesizing input and feedback for a collection of engagement strategies for implementation by city agencies

**Modalities Explored:** Co-design, Research

**Team Members:** Chris LeDantec (Assistant Professor of Digital Media in the School of Literature, Media, and Communication at Georgia Tech), Terica Black (Project Manager Mayor's Office of Innovation & Performance), Terry Ross (Community Engagement Leader-Southwest Trail at Atlanta Beltline Partnership), Jhordan Gibbs (Fellow, City Accelerator), Nasim Fluker (Director of Program, the Westside Future Fund)

**Fund Allocation:** Phase I: Initially a series of community narratives were collected. Due to participant feedback, resources were allocated to researching past engagements and identifying key stakeholder groups to collaborate with for Phase II. Phase II: Researchers planned facilitated community events as well as interviews with internal and external city partners. Co-developed engagement strategies are collated through outputs such as a playbook.

## Baltimore: Improving Services for Re-entry Populations

**Phase I implementation:** Conducting a series of focus groups and a Design Day to source challenges and opportunities for improving reentry services

**Phase II implementation:** Project coordination and collaboration with Mission Launch for designing a platform to integrate re-entry resources

**Modalities Explored:** Co-design, Civic Tech

**Team Members:** Kelly King (Consultant, City of Baltimore), Carly Weis (Campaign Lead), Neal Janey (Director of Public Safety, City of Baltimore), Sunny Schnitzer (Deputy Director of the Mayor's Office on Criminal Justice, City of Baltimore)

**Fund Allocation:** Phase I: Recruitment and participation for focus groups and a Design Day. Phase II: Implementation of a series of design and demo events for a digital tool that collates an updated list of re-entry resources. Launching a media campaign titled "We Are Here".

## New Orleans: Increasing Use of Preventative Healthcare

**Phase I implementation:** Conducting a series of focus groups and a Design Day to source challenges and opportunities for improving the use of preventative healthcare services

**Phase II implementation:** Conducting A/B testing for text messages to encourage scheduling primary healthcare visits. Training community health care ambassadors.

**Modalities Explored:** Co-design, Research, SMS, Face-to-face

**Team Members:** Susan Todd (Director, 504 Healthnet), Dayaamayi Kurimella (Project Lead, City Accelerator), Oliver Wise (Director at Office of Performance and Accountability, City of New Orleans), Jodi Dyer (Social Worker)

**Fund Allocation:** Phase I: Recruitment and participation for focus groups and a Design Day. Phase II: Implementation of a series of design and demo events for a digital tool that collates an updated list of re-entry resources. Launching a media campaign titled “We Are Here.”

## Seattle: Building a Better Back-end for Public Engagement

**Phase I implementation:** Creating a new process for public engagement through activities like consolidating previous efforts, drafting a checklist to implement for meeting planning, building internal partnerships for better coordination

**Phase II implementation:** Increasing use of the public engagement checklist, disseminating new practices for creating outreach and engagement plans, building baseline community and neighborhood information, improving note-taking and documentation practices while creating feedback loops

**Modalities Explored:** Research, Civic Tech

**Team Members:** Kathy Nyland (Director, Seattle Department of Neighborhoods), Patrice Carroll (Senior Planner, City of Seattle), Samantha Stork (Strategic Advisor, City Accelerator)

**Fund Allocation:**Phase I: Coordinating with Project Managers of City departments to implement new processes. Participation in planning meetings to implement new practices. Implementing Sharepoint across departments. Phase II: Supporting the Mayor-issued Executive Order to bring greater equity to the City’s outdated system for promoting public engagement among residents of Seattle’s neighborhoods.

# Appendix 4

MODALITY	PROJECT	PROJECT DESCRIPTION
<p><b>Data Literacy</b></p>	<p><a href="#">Data Therapy</a></p> <p><a href="#">City Digits:</a> <a href="#">Local Lotto</a></p>	<p>Researcher Rahul Bhargava supports community organizations in data visualization and presentation through workshops, webinars, and writing for creative data stories.</p> <p>In 2013, high school STEM students investigated the social implications of state lotteries by interviewing their neighbors, analyzing citywide data, and using their findings to weigh the inequalities and benefits of the system.</p>
<p><b>Design Thinking</b></p>	<p><a href="#">The Participatory Budgeting Project (PBP)</a></p>	<p>Participants select budget delegates who are tasked with researching community needs and submitting community project proposals for residents to vote on. More than \$80 million have been allocated through this process on capital city projects in over 10 cities.</p>

MODALITY	PROJECT	PROJECT DESCRIPTION
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**Design Thinking  
(cont'd)**

[The Market Street Prototyping Festival](#)

In response to feedback from citizens for a more vibrant and positive experience on Market Street, San Francisco organizes an annual festival for interactive artistic installations that are used to reimagine public spaces.

**Face-to-face**

[Marketplace Nights](#)

Marketplace nights have a ritualized structure for neighborhood exchange circles facilitated by Bill Trayvnor. Participants can make offers, requests, or announcements to broker exchanges. Advice, gifts, and favors are frequently shared. Popular, regular marketplace nights have seen the exchange of thousands of dollars worth of valuable resources, information, advice, tips, wisdom and favors.

**Online Deliberation**

[Next Door](#)  
  
[Community Plan It](#)

Next Door is a social network for neighborhoods to share local announcements and requests.  
  
Community Plan It is an online deliberation game focused on community planning. Over the course of a month, participants answer trivia and discussion questions while communicating through a forum to debate planning ideas and compete for prizes.

**Play**

[Boston Coastline: Future Past](#)

This interactive art performance that entailed walking through the City of Boston to imagine how climate change will impact the City's social and physical landscape.







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