EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT

ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

CONTENTS

Introduction

"To restore the power and stature of civic engagement, we must become mindful that those who are excluded from community-based decisions are not excluded from community development impacts."
–Kip Holley, Kirwan Institute

So often, government makes decisions about development projects that greatly impacts the communities they serve without taking their thoughts and opinions into consideration. Or, if they do consult community, it's as a formality halfway through a project, past the point of being able to implement their feedback.

According to Alexander von Hoffman, senior research fellow at the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University, equitable development can be defined as "a new form of community development and urban planning aimed at revitalizing disinvested communities and ensuring that all residents of urban places can shape urban development and benefit from economic growth in an equitable fashion."

The part we will focus on for our purposes is the latter part of that definition, ensuring that all residents can inform development and benefit equitably from the growth it brings. In short, in order to be effective, equitable development strategies require community input to help inform the direction of the project.

The equitable engagement toolkit for development projects is designed to help governments engage with community early on in a development project, whether it be housing, transit, façade improvement, etc. The goal is to help residents feel more included in decisions about projects that are ultimately serving them, while also creating better project outcomes that are more equitable and reflective of what community wants.

Questions to ask when considering a new community engagement effort

Considering starting a new engagement effort? It's important to ask key questions early in the process that will help establish whether an engagement effort is necessary or useful, to avoid wasting time and resources. These questions will also help you start thinking about target population, partner/stakeholder involvement, budget, and other logistics.

1

What are the goals of this community engagement effort?

2

How are you planning on using this information? Can you easily explain that explanation to the public?

3

How will this information translate into implementation? Can you easily explain this to the public?

4

Who is the population you're trying to reach? Why that demographic?

5

Are there cultural nuances that you should consider when engaging with this population? Do you need a translator?

6

Where is the community engagement budget coming from? Is it flexible or a defined amount for this project?

7

Who are the key community stakeholders?

8

What promotional strategies will you use to reach your target audience? (existing community groups, social media outreach, print materials, billboards, etc.)

5

## steps for starting engagement work with partners

Working with other government agencies, consultants, developers, nonprofits and/or any other organizations requires thoughtful and strategic planning to ensure partner accountability, efficiency, transparency, and ultimately the success of a project.

1

Assemble your team: Gather a combination of different partners including government entities, community groups, neighborhood organizations, perhaps consultants, and any other partners who may be heavily impacted by the project. Diversity in experience and community reach will be essential to reaching desired demographics and achieving project outcomes.

2

Establish roles, responsibilities, and expectations. It's essential to establish roles early in the process to avoid issues around power dynamics later. Who is the primary funder of the project? Who is implementing the project? Who will be representing the project in the media? These questions will determine who is making decisions about what. In some cases, this is more obvious than others. In collaborative situations where there are multiple lead agencies funding or implementing the work, it's especially important to determine responsibilities and expectations.
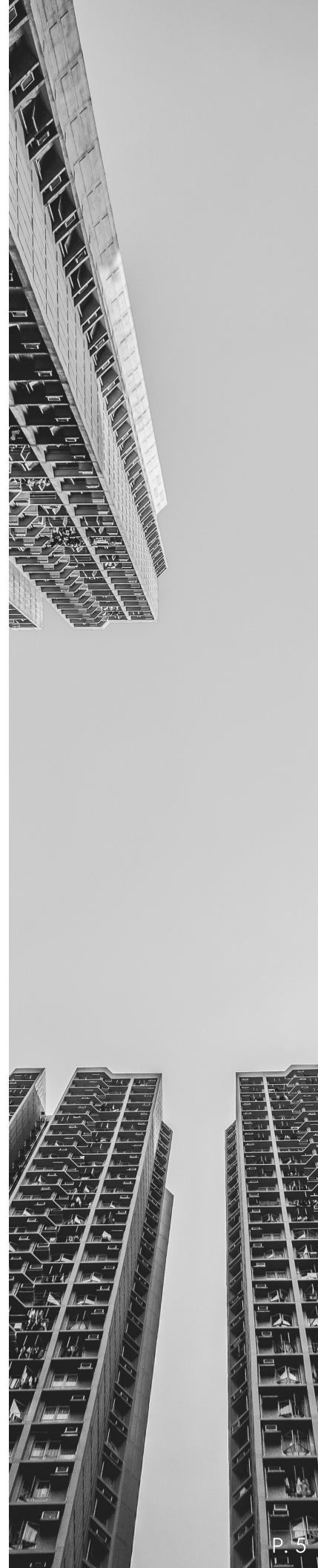
3

Create a working structure. This includes establishing a regular meeting time, place, and determining who should be invited. It also means creating a collaborative workspace to share valuable documents and files. This could take the form of a Microsoft Teams channel, Google Drive, DropBox, WeTransfer board, etc. Make sure that everyone can access and contribute to the shared workspace. This will be essential for editing materials, communicating frequently, and ensuring that everyone is on the same page with where the project is at.

4

Have a clear timeline that all partners agree to. This will be imperative for creating a culture of trust and accountability within your team. It will also be helpful for being transparent about deadlines with the communities you are working with.

5

Identify/ review existing project goals, strategies, and outcomes. If the goals aren't already defined by an RFP or conditions of funding, identify goals. Once goals are identified, review them, and figure out how to accomplish them through actionable strategies. Conversations around specific strategies and action steps should include funding constraints, who is paying for what, who is responsible for implementing specific action items, etc. Lastly, identify final outcomes and how the strategies will result in achieving those outcomes.

INCLUSIVE OUTREACH GUIDE

When it comes to connecting with community, language matters. There are five important concepts to keep in mind when preparing to start a community engagement effort: using specific language, being intentional about who you're reaching out to and why, translating information accordingly, finding your audience, and thinking about how the community has interacted with your agency in the past.

1 **SPECIFIC LANGUAGE**
Will help community identify themselves within your project

2 **INTENTIONALITY**
In who you're reaching out to and how you're using info you collect

3 **TRANSLATIONS**
Engage with your target population

4 **FIND YOUR AUDIENCE**
Defer to the experts to identify outreach methods

5 **HISTORY WITH AGENCY**
Will impact how the community receives information

1 # SPECIFIC LANGUAGE

Be specific.
It's important to be specific about the population you wish to target. For example, if you're specifically aiming to reach out to the Somali immigrant population, avoid using generic terms like "BIPOC," or "people of color," as you want the population to identify themselves within the term you're using.

Use people-first language.

One easy way to make people feel centered in the projects you're doing is to use people-first language. For example, if you're adding an ADA-accessible sidewalk to your development project, instead of saying "this sidewalk will help disabled people move around the space," say "this sidewalk will help people with disabilities or experiencing mobility barriers move around the space."

Other examples:
- People who bike vs. bikers
- People using wheelchairs vs. disabled people
- People who are hearing impaired vs. deaf people

2 Intentionality

Only engage the community in ways that are actually meaningful- you don't want to waste anyone's time collecting information that you won't use, or can't integrate into implementation. It's important that the community feels like their input is being used, otherwise they could lose faith in the project or your agency.

3 Translate

Language can be a key barrier in engaging with your target population, but with thoughtful planning and intention, it doesn't have to be. Sticking with the earlier example, if your goal is to reach out to the Somali immigrant community, it's important to consider how you're communicating. Translate any outreach materials into Somali so that your target audience can receive the information you're trying to communicate.

This includes having translators and interpreters available at outreach or information sessions, and when communicating about the event, making it clear that translators and interpreters will be available.

This also includes deferring to the experts on what will be most effective- language that makes sense in English may not translate directly into another language, or won't have the same implications.

4 Find your audience

Communities have different ways of accessing information. In order to effectively engage with your target audience, work with culturally-specific media outlets and trusted messengers.
Some examples of outreach solutions include:

- Culturally-specific radio stations, newspapers, and community publications that may feature different languages
- Mailers, door-hangers, postcards, etc.
- Social media campaigns (paid or unpaid) using demographic targeting

Use cultural sensitivity

When working with different communities, it's important to remember that there aren't one size fits all language strategies. Different communities will receive and react to information differently based on cultural, ethnic, racial, identity and their personal experiences.

5 History with agency

Be mindful of history between the agency and that community. For example, if certain communities were disparately impacted by a development project that your agency conducted in the past, they may be more weary to show support for the project.

For example, a business owner that had to close their business due to construction on a past project is going to have a much different opinion about a new development project than a business owner who received a lot of new business thanks to façade improvements you made in their business district. Proceed with mindfulness and anticipate difficult questions.

16%
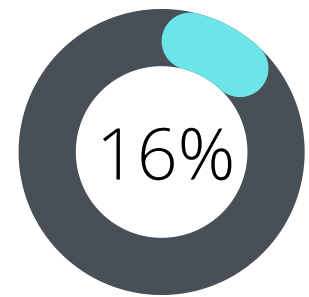
According to a 2017 Pew Research Study, only 16% of people have high trust in information they receive- and this group is disproportionately white, and economically advantaged.

Resource guide

The resources listed below helped inform the creation of this toolkit, and also serve as excellent resources for community engagement, and development staff.

Resource	Author/ source	Notes
Racial Equity Tools, Community Engagement	Center for Assessment and Policy Development, World Trust, MP Associates	A database of resources and tools to help with race equity and community engagement.
The Ingredients of Equitable Development	Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University	Provides three examples of equitable development initiatives, and recommendations.
Five Principles for Launching a Successful Community Development Initiative	Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis	Identifies key trends in community development, lists key definitions, provides insightful examples.
Community Engagement Toolkit	OneAmerica, El Centro de la Raza, other government agencies	Developing a community engagement strategy and partner collaboration plan.
Policy and guidance hub	Government Statistical Service	Database with resources for government communicators on how to effectively present complex information.

Resource	Author/ source	Notes
UNCG Guide to Collaborative Competencies	University Network for Collaborative Governance	Collaborative competency framework, cross-sector collaboration efforts.
Engaging the community in the development of a local housing strategy	Local Housing Solutions	Importance of involving the community in the development of a housing strategy.
Equitable and Inclusive Civil Engagement	Kirwan Institute	Defines key terms, lists social inequities, and describes six elements essential to successful civic engagement.
Five Steps to Successful Community Engagement and Mobilization	Global Communities Partners for Good	Outlines five brief suggestions for community engagement and mobilization.
How People Approach Facts and Information	Pew Research Center	Presents research on how people engage with and process information.