# Fostering Healthy Discourse in Your City

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**Speakers**

**Selena Schmidt** is a founding partner in the Carnegie Mellon spin-out The Art of Democracy, which enables the authentic experiences and ideas of a diverse public to inform decision-making in private, public and nonprofit arenas. Social, civic and private sector entrepreneur, Selena Schmidt is known for leading organizations and spearheading initiatives to solve complex community problems. Her work built cross sector partnerships nationally and international as CEO of Common Impact and Power of 32, National Engagement Strategist for PBS KIDS, Pittsburgh City Council President Chief of Staff, and Leadership Director for the Coro Center for Civic Leadership. Recently returning to her hometown, Selena co-founded the Pittsburgh New Leaders Council Institute and was tapped as Vice President of the Latino Community Center founding board. Selena is also currently engaged in a disruptive healthcare start-up: PA Health & Wellness, a managed care organization solely dedicated to increasing services for the under and uninsured.

Committed to equity, inclusion, and public service, Selena served as Harvard Innovation Lab Social Innovation Coach for women founders and boards including: Strong Women Strong Girls, Coro National Strategic Advisory Committee, Social Venture Partners, National Association of Women Business Owners National PAC Board, and Global Pittsburgh. Selena is proud her work creating the ‘Readiness Roadmap’ to provide free resources for nonprofits to access corporate pro-bono talent was recognized by The White House and being on of the team that elected the first African American woman to Allegheny County office.

**Raquel Goodrich** is the Deputy Director for the National Institute for Civil Discourse. She provides strategic planning guidance and operational support to the organization. She also manages the organization’s public initiatives, including the Revive Civility campaign. She spearheaded development of the Institute’s Text, Talk platform, resulting in over 100,000 participants engaging in text-based, small group discussions on issues facing the nation. Raquel has over 10 years’ experience in meeting facilitation and conflict resolution processes. She previously worked at the Udall Foundation’s U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution, where she provided mediation services, integrated collaborative technologies into conflict resolution processes and conducted training for conflict resolution practitioners. Raquel holds a Master of Public Administration from the University of Maine and a Bachelor of Social Sciences from Unity College.

**Levar M. Stoney** was sworn in as Richmond’s 80th Mayor on Dec. 31, 2016. He is the youngest mayor ever elected to serve the city. Mayor Stoney was raised in Virginia by his grandmother and his father, a janitor. A product of Virginia public schools, he grew up on free and reduced lunch and was the first in his family to earn a high school diploma. He went on to graduate from James Madison University, before moving to Richmond to begin a career in public service. He rose through the ranks to become the first African American Secretary of the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the youngest member of Governor Terry McAuliffe’s cabinet. Under his leadership, state government was made more efficient and rights were restored to more than 18,000 disenfranchised Virginians -- more than the past seven administrations combined. He is a 2006 graduate of the Minority Political Leadership Institute in Richmond, and serves on a number of civic and community boards including the VCU Massey Cancer Center Advisory Board; GRASP, a college- access organization; and the Jamestown Yorktown Foundation 2019 Commemoration. He is also a proud member of Richmond Crusade for Voters and the NAACP. Mayor Stoney has initiated a number of long-term improvement projects aimed at building One Richmond. As promised during his campaign, Mayor Stoney asked Virginia Commonwealth University’s Wilder School for Government and Public Affairs to conduct a performance review. With the results of the review, Richmond is poised to increase and
improve city services. His first budget included a record-breaking investment in Richmond’s public school students. He also created the Monument Avenue Commission, which, along with citizen input, will determine the best way to tell the full story of Richmond’s turbulent history. The Richmond Times Dispatch recognized Mayor Stoney as the 2016 Person of the Year. In June, 2017, he was named a Politico Rising Star. In the 2016-2017 fiscal year alone, the administration has helped create over 2,400 new jobs and has attracted 37 new businesses to the Richmond area.

**Sally Stadelman** is the manager of BigBurgh.com, a smart website that lists all free, high quality services for individuals experiencing homelessness. Originally piloted as a way to better connect unstably housed youth with services, BigBurgh.com proved to be an essential resource for law enforcement. So, in January 2018 Stadelman moved to Public Safety to continue the management of the site, as well as trainings of Police, Fire, and EMS. Before her move to Public Safety, Sally spent two and a half years in the Office of Community Affairs, where she worked closely with the Art of Democracy to execute five Deliberative Community Forum topics, in addition to her role in community outreach and as the Coordinator of the Civic Leadership Academy, a free ten week course on City government.
VOICES OF THE GOVERNING INSTITUTE

Bridging the Disconnect Between the People and Their Governments

Town hall meetings? That system is broken. There are better ways for citizens and public officials to learn from each other and solve problems together.

APRIL 11, 2017

By Myung J. Lee | Contributor

Executive director of Cities of Service

"Do your job!" It's the rallying cry of Americans who, in seemingly unprecedented numbers, are taking to the streets and filling the seats of civic centers to demand that mayors, legislators and other policymakers hear their concerns and take action on a growing number of pressing issues at home and in Washington, D.C. People increasingly feel left out of the process, and they're angry.

Town hall meetings, of course, are supposed to be for just this kind of give and take, a space for people to come together with their governments to learn more about issues, ask questions and voice opinions. But the system is clearly broken. When town halls do take place, they're too often only a space to argue. They've become a place for outrage rather than one where citizens and elected officials can engage with and learn to trust each other.

It's time to reestablish the balance between citizens and their elected representatives. While expressing anger is important, it's seldom as effective as sharing a great idea. We have in front of us the opportunity to tap into an energy and level of engagement that most us have never seen before. And elected officials at all levels of government would be wise to follow the example of city leaders who are partnering with citizens to find real solutions to real public problems.

These are leaders like South Bend, Ind., Mayor Pete Buttigieg, who is a master of using social media to work with his constituency. When I saw Buttigieg at the last year's CityLab conference in Miami, I asked, "What do you do when people are steaming mad at you?" His advice: Listen, and then ask for help. "When someone is yelling at me," he said, "I let them. And then I say, 'OK, you have a point. Now, how can you help me fix it?'" By listening to people and then soliciting their help, he sparks a cycle of trust that leads to real solutions.
These are also leaders like Albuquerque Mayor Richard J. Berry, who is using surveys and conversations with constituents to create a citizen-led vision for prosperity in the city. As part of this "Plan for Prosperity," Berry met with people from across cultures, neighborhoods and age groups and heard countless stories from people who are carving out success for themselves, their families and their communities. When I spoke with the mayor a couple weeks ago, he described the program as the most powerful learning tool an elected official could hope for, providing an opportunity to hear directly from people about their dreams for the place they call home.

There's a method to this magic. At Cities of Service, a nonprofit supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies among others, we believe that relationships between elected officials and citizens can be built and then strengthened through what we call "impact volunteering," a three-step process of deliberation, collaboration and results.

We see that the most successful leaders work with citizens to identify problems -- just as Mayor Buttigieg does in South Bend. They learn from and partner with citizens to find solutions -- just as Mayor Berry does in Albuquerque. And then they join all other involved parties by bringing resources to the table -- expertise, data, legal authority and a shared passion -- to take action.

This impact volunteering model is what prompted then-New York Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg to create NYC Service in 2009. He understood that the people of New York share a strong desire to make their city better (it's something the whole world saw after 9/11) and he wanted to tap that energy on an everyday basis to solve some of the city's toughest problems.

NYC Service led to the creation of the Cities of Service coalition in 2010, and impact volunteering became our central engagement strategy. Volunteering is nice, but cities need more than nice. When they combine and focus the efforts of the mayor and residents to solve tangible problems -- whether fighting climate change, cleaning a vacant lot or educating kids -- you get things done and, in doing so, get past the issues that divide you.

This doesn't only work for cities. It's also a tool that can guide leaders in state capitals and Washington when they face angry constituents back home.

People are crying out for a government they can trust. The citizens who are showing up in droves at town hall meetings and demanding to be heard are an encouraging sign that the will of the people is there. It's up to officials at every level of government to listen to -- and work with -- them to solve the challenges in front of us. This isn't a mystery; we know what steps to take. All that is left to do is to begin.

Myung J. Lee | Contributor | Myung.Lee@citiesofservice.org | @myunglee
In the previous chapter, we examined the scenarios participation leaders commonly face, and described tactics they could use to grapple with those scenarios. For the most part, however, these more productive forms of participation have not been incorporated into the official arenas for participation in education, health, land use, or any other issue. Planners conduct charrettes and then go back to contentious public hearings; healthy communities coalitions advocate healthier lifestyles, even as advisory committees flounder; school districts engage parents on bond issues while PTAs languish.

It is possible to develop a more sustained and productive system for participation on any one of these issues, without thinking of the others—but it would not be wise. Education, health, and land use are inextricably intertwined, and all three issues overlap with and are affected by a host of other issues, such as poverty, environmental protection, public safety, public finance, and economic development, to name but a few.

Citizens care about their children, their health, and their homes—and they care about many other problems and priorities as well. Instead of continuing to view the world through the professionalized, issue-delineated lenses that we first put on in the early 20th Century, we should embrace the holistic, democratic, citizen-centered view that has emerged in the early 21st Century. We can make progress on all these seemingly intractable public issues if we construct, renovate, or knit together a stronger legal, governmental, civic, electoral, and educational infrastructure for participation. This participation infrastructure should sustain and support regular opportunities, activities, and arenas for people to connect with each other, solve problems, make decisions, and celebrate community.
At the very least, we should not attempt to improve participation on one issue without developing some understanding of how these improvements could complement the settings and opportunities available for other issues. Although we may not often be able to create a new “big picture” for participation all at once, we can develop it in such a way that, like starting with the corners and then the edges of the puzzle, they fit together well with other current and future components.

In this chapter, we explore how the pieces of a stronger infrastructure can fit together. Specifically, we describe additional structures and supports that can connect and sustain participation in any issue, suggest some ways of helping people envision a stronger participation infrastructure, and lay out some guiding principles for infrastructure planning.

CONNECTING THE BUILDING BLOCKS FOR PARTICIPATION

The sections on “Strengthening the Infrastructure” in Chapters 4 through 7, and the corresponding figures within the sections, describe six main building blocks for participation infrastructure: disseminating information, gathering input and data, discussing and connecting, enabling smaller-scale decision making, enabling larger-scale decision making, and encouraging public work.

Some of the settings and processes that can support these building blocks already exist in many communities. For example, we explored and suggested ways to improve participation in parent-teacher conferences, school boards, and PTAs and other parent groups (Chapter 4); patient-caregiver interactions, advisory boards and commissions, and healthy community coalitions (Chapter 5); public meetings, planning commissions, and neighborhood and home-owner associations (Chapter 6); and in legislative and agency actions and decisions at the state and federal levels of government (Chapter 7). We also described a number of more cutting-edge vehicles and tactics for participation in education, health, and land use, as well as in state and federal government. These examples of democratic innovation are inspiring, but tantalizingly isolated from one another. Taking stock of the civic assets within a community and deciding which work well, which exist but need to be upgraded, and where there are gaps, is a practical way to approach infrastructure planning. There are also some obvious “universal pieces” that can support and connect participation infrastructures in many different issue areas. We described three of them extensively in other chapters:
• **Hyperlocal and local online networks.** This category of infrastructure is already rapidly growing, and holds great potential for connecting participation in many different issue areas.

• **Buildings that are physical hubs for participation.** The political philosopher Hannah Arendt is said to have remarked that “Democracy needs a place to sit down.” Communities need accessible, welcoming, wired public spaces for participation on a range of issues.

• **Youth councils.** Perhaps the most undervalued of our civic assets, youth leadership should be cultivated and supported in settings specifically for young people.

One final universal piece that can support and connect participation in different arenas and issue areas is the use of participation commissions.

**Participation Commissions**

A local participation commission (or advisory board) can advise a community on the design, implementation, and evaluation of public participation tactics, and more broadly on building and embedding a sustainable participation infrastructure. Such a commission could be an official body constituted by local government, or a stand-alone entity recognized and supported by a range of community institutions, such as foundations, governments, school systems, Chambers of Commerce, and interfaith councils and faith institutions. At the state and federal levels, participation commissions could assist local efforts, support state and federal participation, and connect the work of people and groups inside and outside government.

A commission or board could have one or more of the following responsibilities:

1. Develop and propose a multi-year plan to guide public participation activities, programs, and policies;
2. Develop guidelines and recommendations for inclusive, effective public participation;
3. Provide advice and recommendations regarding the implementation of public participation guidelines and practices;
4. Establish participation measures, publicize and review the results, and help people use the results to improve participation policies and practices; and/or
5. Provide an annual report regarding the status of public participation activities.
A public participation commission or board ought to be constituted in a way that ensures geographically, demographically, and ideologically representative membership. It should adopt its own rules and bylaws, mirroring successful participation practices and including ways for larger numbers of citizens to contribute to the work of the commission (Working Group on Legal Frameworks for Public Participation, 2013).

One way for participation commissions to connect people working in different neighborhoods, communities, and issue areas—and to raise the profile of participation itself—would be to hold a large-scale deliberative process every year. This expectation could be codified in a local participation ordinance, or it could simply be part of a long-term participation plan upheld by a range of local institutions (for more information on public deliberation, see Chapter 8).

SYSTEMIC SUPPORTS FOR PARTICIPATION

In previous chapters, we discussed a number of systemic supports that can be incorporated into participation infrastructures. Here, we identify three additional supports that can buttress participation by helping people develop their skills for organizing, facilitating, clarifying, and measuring it.

Local Participation Ordinances

As we noted in previous chapters, most of the laws governing public participation are at least thirty years old; one of the most notorious, California’s Brown Act, just turned sixty. Because these laws predate not only many of the innovations in face-to-face engagement, but also the Internet itself, it is unclear how they apply to:

- Social media platforms used by public officials and public employees;
- Participation by public officials and public employees in neighborhood online forums, email listservs, and other online arenas;
- Participation by public officials and public employees in small-group dialogue and deliberation as part of larger public engagement efforts;
- Use of online tools to announce and proactively recruit for public meetings (rather than the old formula still found in many laws, which require governments simply to post a notice about a meeting in a city bulletin); and
- Collaboration between public institutions and private, nonprofit, charitable, and faith-based institutions in organizing and supporting public participation.
In all of these scenarios, our laws ought to uphold the values of participation, transparency, privacy, inclusion, fairness, and freedom of speech. But in many cases, it is now difficult to decipher the letter or intent of the law.

One reason why there is more sustained participation in some countries in the Global South may be that they have newer constitutions and a more open-minded approach to the legal framework for participation. Participatory budgeting in Brazil and the Gram Sabha reforms in India have made productive participation a legally accepted and supported part of politics (Mansuri & Rao, 2013).

In the United States, a working group that includes representatives from the International Municipal Lawyers’ Association, International City/County Management Association, American Bar Association, National League of Cities, National Civic League, Policy Consensus Initiative, National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation, and Deliberative Democracy Consortium has worked to produce new legal tools, including a model local ordinance for public participation (Working Group on Legal Frameworks for Public Participation, 2013). The model ordinance is intended to allow innovation, not require it. “We took as our inspiration the laws on alternative dispute resolution (ADR) enacted during the 1980s and 90s,” says Lisa Blomgren Bingham (Working Group on Legal Frameworks, 2013: 6) of Indiana University, a public administration scholar who took the lead drafting role for the working group. “Simply by authorizing public agencies to use mediation, facilitation, and other ADR processes, those laws resulted in a dramatic proliferation of these practices at every level of the legal system.”

**Citizens’ Academies and Other Participation Training Programs**

To be successful, most of the building blocks described in this book require that the people developing and staffing participation activities have certain skills, many of which are described in the Participation Skills Module (see www.wiley.com/go/nabatchi). In many cities, the participation “skill base” is not deep enough to meet this challenge. In other places, the skills are there but so diffused throughout the community that it is not easy to find the people who could be helpful. Within city hall, these capacities are sometimes limited to a small cadre of public employees working out of departments for neighborhood services or human relations.

Many communities have “citizens’ academies” or other training programs that are designed to boost public participation. However, these programs are often limited to informing participants about “how government works”—for example, how to apply for a zoning variance or how the police department deploys officers...
(Morse, 2012). These may be important facts for citizens to know, but they are insufficient for supporting robust public participation.

Nevertheless, citizens’ academies and other training programs have huge potential for supplying the kinds of skills and supports needed for a sustainable participation infrastructure. Specifically, they could be used to inform citizens about why participation is important, issue areas where participation could be useful, and skills that are necessary for improving participation in practice. Moreover, these training programs will work best when:

- They are provided as part of an ongoing program that can train large numbers of people over time.
- Participants are recruited proactively, with a special emphasis on reaching segments of the community that historically have been marginalized or under-represented.
- The curricula and content are publicly available online and in the different languages spoken in the community.
- They help prepare and recruit citizens for membership on public commissions and advisory boards.
- Citizens, public officials, and public employees take part in the trainings together (sometimes as trainers, sometimes as trainees) so that they learn the same skills and build relationships with the other participants.

Online Participation Dashboards

In Part Two of this book, we discussed the use of online dashboards for sparking participation on numerous issues; however, online dashboards can also be used more broadly as supports for participation infrastructure. Specifically, they can be used to track data like turnout, demographics, and participant satisfaction and to make that information publicly available online. In doing so, dashboards can help organizers and participants measure the quality of participation efforts and decide how to improve them.

Some state and local governments are already using performance dashboards to help people visualize spending and program performance by agencies and departments. These online platforms show “how we can much better evaluate and communicate government programs,” writes Pete Peterson (2013). There also dashboards for civic indicators, such as state and local versions that use the Civic Health
Index methodology created by the National Conference on Citizenship (2010). These indices take some of the “meta-data” about citizen engagement, such as rates of voting and volunteerism, and track them over time. Although these kinds of dashboards are valuable and revealing, they would be even more helpful if they allowed communities to track finer-grained data about particular participation efforts.

One of the biggest challenges to evaluating public participation efforts is gathering the data, even on simple measures like turnout. But by following the approach and using some of the technological tools inherent in online platforms, communities can tap the capacity of citizens to contribute. “An online platform to evaluate public participation can provide benefits to all the involved parties by lowering the costs of data collection and data sharing,” write Mariana Becerril-Chavez, Katharyn Lindemann, Jack Mayernik, and Joe Ralbovsky (2012: 23).

**ENVISIONING STRONGER PARTICIPATION INFRASTRUCTURE**

Grand plans are made of small elements. Like arraying puzzle pieces on a table, identifying potential building blocks and systemic supports makes it possible to envision how participation infrastructure might actually look and work.

Many different and complementary visions are possible at all levels of government. For example, in *Bringing Citizen Voices to the Table*, Carolyn Lukensmeyer (2013) suggests several infrastructure components that support national democracy, including: (1) a legislative mandate for participation, (2) safe, accessible physical spaces, (3) broader access to technology, (4) a facilitation infrastructure, (5) an organizational infrastructure, (6) a trustworthy, fact-based media, and (7) robust civic education. Similarly, many things can be done to support the creative process of envisioning a stronger local participation infrastructure. Here we suggest five: making it clear that participation is a cross-sector priority; using plainer, more compelling language; encouraging both progressive and conservative visions of and prescriptions for participation; providing visual aids, like charts and maps; and encouraging artistic expressions of future forms of democracy.

**Making It Clear That Participation Is a Cross-Sector Priority**

In Chapters 4 through 6, we described the official, governmental settings for public participation in education, health, and land use, and suggested ways to improve them. We also pointed out that many organizations and networks have a current or potential role in public participation. On almost every issue, from public safety
to public finance, one could assemble similar lists of extra-institutional allies with a stake in participation.

It should be clear from these descriptions that public participation is more than a governmental responsibility. A strong, healthy local democracy is something that benefits every community member, every organization, and every local leader. City hall can play a key role in improving and sustaining local democracy, but it should not dictate the plan and it cannot bear the whole burden of implementing it. The Institute for Local Government (n.d.: 3–4) urges public officials to develop “mutual partnerships” by engaging with “neighborhood and community organizations to involve their members, or through these groups to involve the wider community, in appropriate public engagement activities over time. In some cases this may include structured relationships/agreements between neighborhood associations or community groups with . . . local government departments.”

It may be that community foundations, along with other nonprofit groups that have a long-term stake in the community and are above the political fray, are best positioned to convene infrastructure planning efforts (Gibson & Leighninger, 2013). In any case, planning for stronger participation infrastructure should be a cross-sector, collaborative endeavor.

**Using Plainer, More Compelling Language**

“Participation infrastructure” is a dry and abstract-sounding term. Furthermore, the term “public participation” is often used interchangeably with many other civic synonyms, such as public engagement, democratic governance, citizen participation, participatory democracy, civic engagement, public involvement, citizen-centered work, public work, and public deliberation (Lee & Polletta, 2010; Nabatchi, 2014; Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014; Thomas & Leighninger, 2010). None of these terms is likely to grab the attention of the average person, let alone serve as a rallying cry for change. Participation leaders can use plainer, more compelling language to describe the potential features and benefits of a more participatory community. The “Civic Utopia” example in Box 9.1, which was developed by the Community Matters Partnership convened by the Orton Family Foundation, is one example of how to do this.

**Encouraging Both Progressive and Conservative Visions**

Participation is often stereotyped as a “liberal” project, despite the fact that some of the most interesting innovations, such as the British Columbia Citizens’ Assembly, came from the imaginations of right-of-center public officials—and despite the fact
Box 9.1. Civic Utopia Combining Democratic Innovations to Create the Community We Want

A Vision Statement from the Community Matters Partnership

What is the future of civic engagement and local democracy? Two years ago, a set of organizations convened by the Orton Family Foundation began meeting around this question. All of the groups were involved in helping communities engage citizens or build community, but in very different ways—from online engagement to face-to-face dialogue, from public deliberation to community development, from grantmaking to placemaking.

Through these conversations, the organizations realized that our different perspectives and areas of expertise could be combined into a common, compelling vision about the kinds of communities people want. We formed the Community Matters Partnership to help communities work on their own visions:

- Imagine living in a neighborhood that had inviting public spaces, indoors and outdoors, attracting all kinds of people.
- Imagine going to a city council, school board, or zoning meeting and spending most of the time in a small-group discussion where you were able to learn, listen, talk—and feel like your views would contribute to policy decisions.
- Imagine living in a community with a steady supply of small grants available for teams of everyday people to work on local problems.
- Imagine living in a city where your ideas and projects were considered when shaping the city budget.
- Imagine being part of an online neighborhood network you could tap into quickly and easily to ask questions like: “Who can recommend a good plumber?” “Who has a canoe I can borrow?,” “What is in the school system’s redistricting plan?”
- Imagine being able to report public problems—from potholes and graffiti to low test scores at the grade school—in a way that captured the attention of public decision-makers and that gave you opportunities to help solve the problem.
- Imagine having an easily accessible map of your neighborhood that showed what new buildings were being proposed, what zoning issues were on the horizon, and how you could take part in those decisions.
- Imagine a school in which you and other parents met regularly with the teacher to discuss how things were going in the classroom.
- Imagine living in a community with a system of youth councils that gave students the chance not only to learn leadership skills for the future, but to exercise leadership in the present.

For more information, see www.communitymatters.org/
that evidence about the aggregate impact of thick participation on public opinion does *not* suggest a left-leaning bias (Weiksner, Gastil, Nabatchi, & Leighninger, 2012). Nevertheless, the language used to advance participation is commonly associated with “liberal” or “left-leaning” terms and goals, such as equality (of voice and opportunity), concern for the disenfranchised, and appeals to consensus and community. Participation can also be articulated in “conservative” or “right-leaning” terms and goals, such as non-governmental action, local authority, and the power of citizens to control public decisions and spending. Prime Minister David Cameron’s vision of the “Big Society” in the United Kingdom could be considered a conservative picture of civic infrastructure (Peterson, 2010).

Both as an inspiring vision and as a practical plan, the need for stronger participation infrastructure should be couched in both progressive and conservative ways. We should describe the challenge in ways that invite responses and prescriptions from all political parties and across the ideological spectrum (Nabatchi, 2014).

**Using Visual Aids, Like Charts and Maps**

Using charts that describe the kinds of activities that are (or will be) happening in a more participatory community can help supplement and clarify the language of participation. The “Participation Infrastructure” figures in Chapters 4 through 7 could serve as visual aids that elucidate participation activities in different issue areas. Other charts such as the “Spectrum of Public Engagement Activities” produced by the Democratic Governance Panel of the National League of Cities (Leighninger & Mann, 2011) could be adapted to show the range of participatory activities happening in a community.

A second way of providing visual aids is to map the activities taking place in a community. In Chapter 8, we explored mapping as a specific participatory tactic; here, we suggest that mapping can be done more broadly. Interactive maps that encompass a wide range of local information, including opportunities for participation, can be extremely useful for helping people to take stock of the settings, vehicles, and hubs of participation—to see what is available, what is coming, and where there are gaps.

**Encouraging Artistic Expressions of Democracy**

Finally, envisioning a stronger participation infrastructure can be facilitated by tapping into citizens’ creative impulses and encouraging more artistic expressions
of how participation infrastructure might look. A fairly common practice in land use planning and visioning is to invite participants to take photographs or draw pictures of places in their community that they value or that need upgrading. This same approach can be used to more broadly imagine the possibilities for participation infrastructure in communities.

Inspired by the work of artist Leandro Erlich (shown in the bottom right corner), Figure 9.1 uses physical architecture as a scaffold for participation opportunities. Figure 9.2 offers a map of online communities around the world. Both figures provide creative examples of what a civic infrastructure might look like. Another artistic expression, suggested by John Stephens (forthcoming), is to use the human body as a metaphor for the body politic. Using these kinds of analogies, along with their own artistic impulses, people may be able to envision participation infrastructure in ways that are more compelling, understandable, and fun.

Figure 9.1
The Architecture of Participation Infrastructure

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<th>Local Civic Infrastructure</th>
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Civic Groups
Dashboard of democracy indicators
Text/Talk/Act events
Mapping assets and problems
Online discussion
Meetings that are also parties

Public Participation for 21st Century Democracy 297
SMALL “d” DEMOCRATIC PLANNING FOR SMALL “d” DEMOCRATIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Creating grand visions of how participation infrastructure might look, and surveying the potential components of such an infrastructure, can be inspiring but also daunting. Communities ought to embrace this challenge, at regular intervals,
in the same way that land use comprehensive plans are devised and revised every few years. But if this is not possible, all is not lost. The fact is that most of the time, most of us do not have realistic chances to re-imagine how our communities should work—or, at least, we do not have realistic chances to implement those visions. It is much more likely that we can change how participation works in the context of a single neighborhood, a single school, or a single issue area (although we still need to contemplate and understand potential effects on other settings and issues).

Although that kind of piecemeal approach may not be as inspiring, it is also not as daunting. It reflects the fact that most infrastructures, whether they are physical, technological, or conceptual, are not built all at once. They are assembled over time, with different people and organizations taking a hand in different places. One might even argue that the idea of grand plans revisited periodically is itself a relic of early 20th Century Progressive thinking. The 21st Century mode of planning (and replanning), exemplified by shared resources like Wikipedia, is piecemeal, collective, collaborative, crowdsourced, and constant. Instead of a grand plan, we need a series of smaller plans that are united through their common principles and practices—what Abhi Nemani (2014), one of the founders of Code for America, calls a system of “small (city) pieces, loosely joined.” If this book describes more participatory forms of governance—democracy with a small “d”—then perhaps these systems are best constructed in small “d” democratic ways.

What, then, are those common principles of small “d” democratic planning for small “d” democratic infrastructure? No matter what issue or geographic jurisdiction they are working on, planners of participation infrastructure ought to:

- Cross silos within government and between different sets of experts;
- Understand and articulate the broader context and reasons why people might want to participate, going beyond the specific policy decision to the bigger picture;
- Find out where citizens are already assembled, face-to-face and online, and how to tap into those settings;
- Assemble people in new settings and in ways that make further assembly and reassembly more likely;
- Map everything, and make those maps transparent and responsive;
- Build databases and other repositories of information on the community and people who live there;
• Facilitate accountability as much as possible—by giving participants decisions to make and/or by giving decision-makers many chances to respond; and

• Measure participation in ways that match with other measurement efforts and allow citizens to be part of the measuring.

With these principles in mind, it is also important to remember that participation infrastructure can be built in many different ways. In some places, there may already be so many civic assets and opportunities for citizens that little actual building is necessary; rather, efforts would be focused on improving the settings and opportunities and connecting them with one another as part of an overarching community plan. In other communities, there may be more gaps in the civic picture, and new building blocks must be added to fill them. Some places may be able to create a comprehensive plan for participation infrastructure all at once, whereas other communities may make slower, more incremental progress. Every place is likely to have its own unique culture of participation.

But however it is built, however slowly or quickly it develops, and whatever it looks like in the long run, the participation infrastructure has to work—both for the individuals it serves and the institutions it encompasses. Builders of participation infrastructure must periodically ask several questions:

• Why will people care about this?
• How will it serve our needs as citizens?
• Why will people participate?
• How will this make the work of public officials, public employees, and other stakeholders easier, more effective, and more gratifying?

To the extent possible, they must develop ways of measuring and benchmarking their answers to these questions.

Above all, the local infrastructure for participation must reflect the needs and goals of ordinary people. Generating broader public understanding and ownership of participation infrastructure may be important—and may even be absolutely necessary—for building and sustaining that infrastructure. As John Stephens and Matt Leighninger (forthcoming) write:

The democratic principles that animate this work suggest that citizens should, as a matter of right, have a say in how their communities function. If they do not, the design of civic infrastructure could
be yet another aspect of public life that is controlled and concealed by a small elite. In other words, the public should have the opportunity to participate in designing, supporting, and improving public participation.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, we made the case for holistic models of participation infrastructure. While it is possible to strengthen the infrastructure for one issue, we argued that communities are better off taking a more multi-faceted, citizen-centered view of participation. Efforts to renovate official settings and create new opportunities for participation should be connected to other pieces, so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

There are no “cookie-cutter” recipes for this work: every community should develop ideas and plans that fit local needs, assets, and goals. To help assemble the participation infrastructure for a community, we identified several “universal pieces” that would help people address many different issues and challenges, including hyperlocal and local online networks, buildings that are physical hubs for participation, and youth councils. The most helpful piece may be participation commissions, which can advise communities and agencies on the design, implementation, and evaluation of public participation tactics, as well as on building and embedding a sustainable participation infrastructure. Next, we turned to some of the systemic supports that are needed for participation infrastructure and specifically examined local participation ordinances, citizens’ academies and other training programs, and online participation dashboards.

With these pieces and supports in mind, it becomes easier to envision how a stronger participation infrastructure might actually look and work. We suggested five ways to support the creative process of envisioning a stronger participation infrastructure in communities: making it clear that participation is a cross-sector priority; using plainer, more compelling language; encouraging both progressive and conservative prescriptions for participation; providing visual aids; and encouraging artistic expressions. Finally, we suggested that more participatory forms of governance are best constructed in participatory ways. To that end, we identified several common principles of small “d” democratic planning for small “d” democratic infrastructure.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the opening of this chapter, the authors assert that more productive forms of participation are not often incorporated into the official settings for participation in education, health, land use, or any other issue. Why do you think this is the case?

2. Develop a plan for creating a participation commission in your community or for an issue. Where would it be housed? Who would be on it? What would be its responsibilities?

3. Do you believe it is important to develop a local participation ordinance? Why or why not?

4. Does your community have a citizens’ academy or other training programs? If so, what is the current curriculum for that program? Does it include participation? How might participation be incorporated into that program?

5. The authors assert that the language of participation is not clear or compelling, and that it fails to capture both progressive and conservative visions. Do you agree with these claims? Why or why not? What are your suggestions for talking about participation in a way that is exciting and understandable to people, regardless of their political views?

6. How would you go about mapping the participation activities taking place in your community? What information, opportunities, and other ideas are available? Where are there gaps?

7. Channel your inner creative genius and develop an artistic expression of a participation infrastructure. Why did you make the choices you made?

8. Some have suggested using analogies to explain the idea of a participation infrastructure, for example, likening it to a human body or to physical architecture. What analogy or analogies would you use to explain participation infrastructure?

9. What do the authors mean by small “d” democratic planning and small “d” democratic infrastructure? Do you agree with the common principles of democratic planning for democratic infrastructure? Why or why not? What would you add or eliminate?
10. What are the tradeoffs between grand visions and piecemeal approaches to developing a local participation infrastructure? Which approach do you think is better and why? How would you go about engaging others in discussions about developing stronger participation infrastructure in your community?

References


Bridging Divides, Building Community.

All-America Conversations Toolkit
Bridging Divides, Building Community.

Since 1949, the National Civic League’s All-America City Award has recognized cities and towns committed to using cross-sector collaboration and inclusive resident engagement to work across dividing lines and to create more equitable communities.

After last year’s divisive election cycle, there’s never been a more important time for communities across America to stand up for the values that make cities and towns strong: civility, humanity, trust, compassion, innovation and inclusion. The National Civic League is challenging communities across the U.S. to hold “All-America Conversations” that will identify the small, specific actions that remind people how we CAN work together across dividing lines and help our communities reflect the best of what America can be.

These conversations are aimed at bringing together residents in small, conversational settings to exchange ideas about their communities. Some communities also may choose to hold larger gatherings in which people break up into small groups or to conduct the conversation as part of another forum. Regardless of format, the conversations are meant to address three main questions: 1) how can our community reflect the best of what we see in America, 2) what are the divisions in our community and how do they impact our ability to live in the kind of community we want, and 3) how can we bridge these divisions?

About the All-America Conversations Toolkit
The All-America Conversations Toolkit contains everything you need to hold a productive and meaningful conversation – just add residents.

The toolkit helps you accomplish the following goals:
• Identify what you want to learn and whom to engage
• Develop strategies for reaching beyond the usual suspects
• Decide where to hold the conversations and how to set up the room
• Select and prepare facilitators and note takers
• Understand what questions to ask
• Adapt the conversation guide to different types of meetings
• Determine how to review and theme your notes to find action steps

The kit also includes: tips for facilitators and note takers; a note taking tool; ground rules; a sign-in sheet; sample recruitment letter; sample email to engage the media around these conversations.

In addition to this toolkit, NCL is providing free coaching to communities through conference calls so local leaders can think about how to use these conversations to meet local challenges and fit with existing programs and staff resources.

For the most up-to-date information and resources visit: www.nationalcivicleague.org/all-america-conversations
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Determining what you’re trying to learn

All-America Conversations are incredibly versatile. It is critical to consider what you’re interested in learning as you plan the conversations; this makes it easier to know whom to invite (page 4) and which engagement approach to use (page 8).

| Key Tip: Focus on learning not confirming |
| Meaningsful community conversations start with a desire to learn from others. They can be incredibly powerful, if, and only if, you are willing to be surprised and to learn new things. Holding community conversations to justify existing efforts or gather quotes bolstering your position wastes time and erodes trust. |

All-America Conversations can help you learn:

- These conversations can be a great way to engage underrepresented groups or perspectives. You could decide to hold a series of conversations with people of color, with those experiencing homelessness, with recent immigrants or religious minorities. These conversations may reveal that the key challenges facing those we rarely engage are different from what we expected.

- Some communities will use these conversations to identify shared values between groups on different sides of key issues, or those we perceive to hold little in common. A few conversations with each “side” and then a few conversations that bring together both sides of an issue can often reveal that we have more in common than that which divides us. We can learn how, together, we can take several small actions to make progress despite our differences.

- These conversations can help to uncover the differences and similarities between different parts of town. It can be surprising and exciting to see just how much people share in common across seemingly different neighborhoods or to learn how place seems to shape their perspective on the dividing lines facing the community.

- Other groups will use several of these questions within existing meetings or conversations to build their understanding of the community; and to reinforce, in multiple settings, the idea that the city is committed to learning about residents’ experience and working across dividing lines.

- These conversations can help identify previously unknown trusted local leaders or groups in the community that can help move things forward.

What do you want to learn from these conversations?

How might community conversations help you understand those you serve?

What approach (small group, large meeting, part of existing meeting) fits what you want to learn?
Whom to Engage

Bridging local divides to build a stronger community means striving to learn from the full diversity of resident perspectives. Including typically underrepresented groups is important to creating a clear picture of the community and its challenges.

The idea of “going beyond the usual suspects” is easy to talk about, but for many communities it is a real challenge. This toolkit will help you think about whom you might want to engage and how to leverage partners and other relationships to go beyond those you already know.

You want to do your best to include as many perspectives as feasible – depending on your resources and what you want to learn. But, it takes time to build the relationships necessary to ensure the full diversity of your community can engage in these conversations and future processes.

Key Tip: Diverse opinions doesn’t mean you must make each conversation demographically representative

Seeking a diversity of perspectives does NOT mean that every conversation has to reflect your community’s demographics. Ultimately, the goal is to hold enough conversations to better understand the community and learn from people you might not usually engage.

You want to engage diverse perspectives through these conversations. That does not mean that each conversation must include people representing the full diversity of the community.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach, engaging different groups often requires the use of different recruitment strategies. Talking to partners and others who work directly with the group in question is a great way to learn how to best recruit or engage a population. For instance, it is often more effective to organize a conversation of young people and their peers rather than inviting them to a conversation with adults. Other underrepresented groups may also find it easier to share their perspective in a peer group setting. Having a more homogenous group can create a safe place for residents to fully disclose how they feel about issues. For example, to learn if Muslim immigrants feel less safe or are receiving more verbal attacks, engaging Muslim residents among their peers may create a more comfortable environment. Then after learning about other perspectives you could work to bring together some of the participants from the initial Muslim-focused conversation to engage with others. In the end, different groups and different learning objectives will require different recruitment and engagement strategies.

Demographics are an important piece of understanding the diversity of your community, but it is also important to think about the different perspectives that are not often considered or captured in demographics. For example, renters may have different perspective on issues than homeowners. New residents may bring different perspectives and insights from long-term residents.
Strategies for Engaging Beyond the “Usual Suspects”

Most communities have developed effective recruitment and engagement approaches to reach what we might call “the usual suspects.” In our experience, most communities find it easier to engage middle to upper-income, white homeowners compared to residents of color, low-income residents or religious or ethnic minorities. The following suggestions provide insights into potential partners and engagement strategies for going beyond the usual suspects and reaching groups that are often underrepresented in community decision-making. This is far from a comprehensive list.

People of Color
Potential engagement partners for targeting people of color include: Networks, associations or membership/advocacy groups such as Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, African-American sororities or fraternities, the NAACP, Urban League chapters. Partnering with congregations, such as churches offering services in Spanish or AME congregations, can also be effective. Small, local minority-owned businesses, like barber shops, restaurants, bodegas, or grocery stores may be able to help you connect with residents or leaders you don’t already know.

Different Religious Perspectives
Look to form partnerships with local faith leaders, or congregations when trying to specifically engage Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs and other faith communities. Local halal or kosher groceries and restaurants are another avenue for engaging these residents. In some places, religious diversity tracks closely with nationality or ethnic identity. For instance, a Somali Community Center might be an effective way to reach Muslim residents, or an Indian restaurant might help connect you with Sikhs or Hindus.

Youth/younger residents
Most young people will feel more comfortable among their peers, so when recruiting young people encourage them to invite their friends to attend as well. Potential partners or avenues for reaching young people include: Boys and Girls Clubs, student government groups, local colleges or community colleges, youth advisory boards or high school civics teachers.

LGBTQI
Potential partners or avenues for engaging LGBTQI residents: local PFLAG chapters or similar advocacy organizations, inclusive and welcoming churches or local bars/clubs catering to LGBTQI residents.
**Low-income residents**
It often takes more digging – for an outsider - to find out the key community gathering places, trusted partners and important connectors in lower-income areas. This could include working with small local businesses such as beauty shops, corner stores or thrift shop, or service agencies like a church with a soup kitchen, a homeless shelter or a Head Start center. Be mindful of the barriers to engagement for low-income residents: time, resources, language, child care and feeling uncomfortable to engage in settings where they have been excluded historically. Providing child care, as well as ensuring that the conversation (if possible) is accessible by public transportation can make it much easier for some low-income residents to participate.

**Recent Immigrants and/or residents whose primary language is not English**
When engaging recent immigrants (particularly those who may not have legal residency), working with a trusted local partner is absolutely essential. Potential partners include: local resettlement agencies, local nonprofits (particularly those offering services in multiple languages), immigration advocates, or ESL teachers who can help pass information along to students and families. Locally-owned restaurants, groceries or other small businesses can be helpful partners in engaging residents.

**Renters**
Reaching low- to moderate-income renters relies on many of the same strategies used to reach other groups listed above. Several specific strategies include: partnering with affordable housing groups, local management companies (asking to post flyers or invitations in common spaces), renter advocacy groups or nonprofits focused on fair and affordable housing.

**Key Tip: Keep asking who else do we need to include**
Throughout the process, you should ask yourself, what other perspectives do we need to fully understand things? Who else can/should we engage?

**Mapping and Engaging the Different Perspectives in your Community**
After reviewing the list above, pull together two or three people from your community or organization to answer the questions below.

1) What are the different interests, views and perspectives of the community?
2) What perspectives do we need to understand to create a more equitable community?
3) Are there groups that are not often consulted or considered?

After you have created a thorough list, begin adding individuals or organizations who could help you reach different groups. If you do not have a connection to certain groups, begin brainstorming connector individuals. For example, if you listed residents who do not speak English, you could reach out to an adult ESL teacher as the connector to that group.
LEADING THE WAY: PITTSBURGH, PA

April 4, 2017 | Camille Morse Nicholson

As we explore exciting cases of citizen engagement initiatives across the country, our first installment of this series brings us to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

It is no coincidence that people tend to trust local government at much higher levels than federal government. One likely contributor to this prevailing attitude is the proximity of local public officials to their constituents—one can often more easily contact their City Councilmember, Mayor, or City Administrator than their Congressperson—supports relationships built on accountability and responsiveness. On the state and federal levels, legislators hammer out policy details far removed from their constituents and largely rely on their phone calls and emails to provide any feedback on proposed legislation. In contrast, many cities currently use citizen engagement practices to gather feedback for policy development, and in-person events tend to be more frequent. Given these difference in engagement dynamics, it’s both possible and practical to utilize deliberation in local policy development.

One city stands out in its efforts to increase public deliberation and citizen participation: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Through its partnership with Carnegie Mellon University’s Program for Deliberative Democracy, the City of Pittsburgh has developed a tool for city government to use as a guide for developing deliberative, citizen-driven engagement programming. Part of Mayor William Peduto’s campaign platform was an increase of citizen engagement and, as mayor, Peduto supported the recommendation to make Pittsburgh a center for deliberative democracy. As a result of this commitment, the city has used Deliberative Forums for the selection of a new Chief of Police and to set goals for its capital budget. Using the lessons learned from the experience of holding Deliberative Forums, the city partnered with the Art of Democracy to craft “A Handbook for Deliberative Community Forums,” intended to provide other cities with best practices and recommendations for their own future citizen engagement processes.

City leaders who have chosen to utilize this exciting engagement tool include Pittsburgh’s Black Elected Officials Coalition, which organized a series of six women’s roundtables to
hear from residents of distressed communities about their concerns regarding affordable housing, employment, development of Black businesses, and other quality of life issues. They used the series of events to identify problems and surface possible solutions, distribute surveys to attendees, and organize key findings and recommendations. The findings were then used to create the draft outline of the “Peace and Justice Initiative” policy document. This document, generated entirely by citizens, business owners, and community leaders, will be used as a guide in working with the city to address quality of life issues.

In 2016 the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County collaborated on “My Brother’s Keeper,” a push to improve the livelihood of young people, particularly boys and young men of color. Local leaders and strategic partners gathered for the “My Brother’s Keeper” (MBK) Summit. Following the Summit, a committee of participants gathered to create the MBK Playbook, which held strategies and action steps to support young men and boys of color. Once a draft of the MBK Playbook was created, the City of Pittsburgh held three Deliberative Forums to solicit community feedback for incorporation into the Playbook’s final iteration.

The City of Pittsburgh is a participant in the “100 Resilient Cities” program, a global initiative which works with cities to support the development and implementation of resilience-focused policy. At the core of the city’s recently-released Resilience Strategy is a focus on collaborative action between government, business, and individuals. In developing the Resilience Strategy, the need for citizen involvement in decision-making arose repeatedly. Continued utilization of Deliberative Forums and an expansion of the city’s Civic Leadership Academy are embedded in the goal to “educat[e], engag[e], and empower residents to take part in civic decision-making.” Through the 100 Resilient Cities program, Pittsburgh has established a partnership with Semarang, Indonesia. Local government in Semarang is working to improve their public participation processes, and Pittsburgh aims to incorporate their identified best practices into future engagement efforts.

The success of citizen-driven engagement frequently hinges on, or at least is accelerated by, support from public officials. While citizen deliberation is not used systematically in official decision making, many public officials in Pittsburgh have adopted deliberative principles and practices as part of their commitment to good governance. These pioneering officials think differently about who holds knowledge in our society and who should hold power in our democracy, and we look forward to seeing a continued embrace of quality deliberation in Pittsburgh.
Dietrich College of Humanities and Social Sciences

November 22, 2016

CMU, City Officials Write the Book on Deliberative Democracy

If the results of the contentious 2016 presidential election have taught us anything, it’s that people on both sides of the aisle want to be heard.

Through deliberative democracy, ordinary citizens are empowered to play an active role in policy decisions. With help from Carnegie Mellon University’s Program for Deliberative Democracy (PDD), the City of Pittsburgh is becoming a national model for this community-driven approach to addressing important issues.

A part of the Center for Ethics and Policy, the PDD has used deliberative democracy techniques since 2005 to glean informed public opinion on everything from marriage equality to women’s reproductive rights.

Through structured conversations including moderated roundtable discussions, Q&A sessions with expert panels and an exit survey, deliberative community forums engage diverse groups of citizens in decision-making. By creating a forum for all voices to be heard, public officials develop trust within their communities and increase their constituents’ investment in the outcomes of their decisions.

“We’ve redesigned the town hall meeting, moving away from seven angry citizens and a microphone to a forum that is civil and thoughtful,” said Robert Cavalier, director of the PDD and teaching professor of philosophy in the Dietrich College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

In 2013, Mayor William Peduto supported a recommendation from the Civic Health Index that Pittsburgh become a center for deliberative democracy. Within a year, the city began organizing deliberative community forums to select a new Chief of Police and set goals for its capital budget. And this November, at the National League of Cities (NLC) conference—which drew
close to 3,000 elected officials from across the U.S. to Pittsburgh—the city rolled out “A Handbook for Deliberative Democracy Forums.”

CMU’s Metro21 initiative provided funding to support the creation of the handbook, which includes case studies and tips on developing briefing materials and recruiting participants. The Art of Democracy, a new CMU spinoff consultancy, assumed a leading role in facilitating the city's deliberative community forums and composed the handbook in consultation with PDD and the city’s Office of Community Affairs.

In the handbook’s foreword, Peduto wrote, “Deliberative community forums offer well-structured opportunities for informed and inclusive public engagement.”

He continued, “They facilitate civil dialogue among citizens from diverse backgrounds and between citizens and policy makers. As a result, these forums provide a means for gathering rich input about particular issues in ways that strengthen civic relationships and improve our community’s overall civic health.”

The use of deliberative community forums at the city level is the culmination of several years of networking and consensus building between the PDD and the city.

“What is critical in all this is the fact that the city has institutionalized this practice, making it a part of the public comment process,” remarked Cavalier.

Sally Stadelman, deputy manager in the City of Pittsburgh’s Office of Community Affairs, has been involved in the project since her days as an intern for Peduto. Stadelman believes that one of the most significant aspects of the deliberative forums is the public-private partnership that blossomed at CMU.

“It took on a life of its own,” she said. “And now, the Mayor’s Office has a useful and practical tool to improve the way we interact with the community.”

By Emily Stimmel
A Handbook for Deliberative Community Forums

Prepared for the City of Pittsburgh
by
The Program for Deliberative Democracy,
Carnegie Mellon University
and
The Art of Democracy
Foreword

My administration actively encourages innovation in every area of governance, which includes how we engage with our community. We have found Deliberative Community Forums to be an excellent way of engaging residents, and they have become an important element of the way we pursue good government in Pittsburgh.

The City of Pittsburgh has used Deliberative Community Forums to generate meaningful public engagement on a variety of topics. Using these protocols, residents helped us make a timely decision in the selection of a new Chief of Police. During our capital budgeting process, these forums helped us to better identify residents’ priorities. We also have had much success engaging residents on future policy directions and national initiatives by using the deliberative model to facilitate resident engagement with our Affordable Housing Task Force and our City’s adoption of the White House’s My Brother’s Keeper initiative.

Deliberative Community Forums offer well-structured opportunities for informed and inclusive public engagement. They facilitate civil dialogue among citizens from diverse backgrounds and between citizens and policy makers. As a result, these forums provide a means for gathering rich input about particular issues in ways that strengthen civic relationships and improve our community’s overall civic health.

The ongoing effort to institutionalize Deliberative Community Forums has led to the development of this Handbook. I believe the guidance it provides will help other municipal officials and community groups create public engagement opportunities that are more inclusive, more enriching and more productive.

William Peduto
Mayor, City of Pittsburgh
Why Deliberative Democracy?

Deliberative Community Forums are a proven strategy for engagement that

- Creates a civil, non-confrontational environment for neighbors to learn from neighbors and for policy makers to learn from constituents
- Creates engagement that respects people’s differences—all voices, not just the loudest, have a chance to be heard
- Provides an efficient means for generating robust feedback that is more broadly representative

For more than twenty years, deliberative democracy has flourished across the globe as people have worked to devise strategies that involve residents of diverse communities in the decision making processes that affect their lives. The following elements are shared by most work identified as deliberative public engagement:

- It engages a group of citizens reflective of the diversity of the communities affected by the outcomes of the deliberation
- It involves diverse groups in structured discussions
- It provides people with the opportunity to compare values and experiences, consider a range of policy options, and engage relevant arguments and information
- It aims to produce tangible actions and outcomes

Three principles provide a foundation for practitioners of deliberative democracy: *inclusion, reciprocity, and legitimacy*. Based in these principles, Deliberative Community Forums seek to *engage difference as a resource*.

From their lived experience, people develop valuable insights on the issues facing their communities. Public officials and policy makers, too, have valuable perspectives to share. Deliberative Community Forums
Deliberative Community Forums

Deliberative Community Forums seek to discover what people think about an issue after they have engaged deeply with multiple, alternative perspectives. These forums provide the resources citizens need to develop an opinion informed by relevant facts, expert information, and an understanding of how issues and policies affect others in their community.

Elements of a Deliberative Forum

1. Organizers recruit a diverse group of participants.
2. Participants receive background materials offering basic information and a balanced overview of various perspectives on issues.
3. Participants engage in small-group discussions facilitated by trained moderators.
4. Participants’ questions are addressed by a resource panel of people with expertise on the issues.
5. Participants return to small groups to reflect on the information provided by resource panelists.
6. Participants complete an exit survey.

Elements of a Community Deliberative Forum
The more opportunities like this I take advantage of, the more proud I am to be a Pittsburgh resident.

Participant, Chief of Police Selection Forums

Benefits of a Deliberative Forum

• Participants develop an opinion informed by relevant facts, expert information, and an understanding of how issues and policies affect others in their community.

• Participants enrich their understanding of their own perspective.

• Participants develop understanding of new or alternative perspectives.

• Participants develop a more comprehensive knowledge about the issues.

• Participants practice skills of civil deliberation.

• Process fosters civic connectivity.
Case Study: City of Pittsburgh Chief of Police Selection

At the start of his administration, Mayor Bill Peduto committed to an innovative selection process for recruiting a senior management team, including a new Chief of Police. Known as the Talent City initiative, this process, launched by the Pittsburgh Foundation and the University of Pittsburgh’s Institute of Politics, was designed to ensure that the recruitment process emphasized skills and expertise and not political patronage. Managed by the Pittsburgh Foundation, the process involved posting job openings on the Talent City website, having a committee of diverse community members screen applicants, and the committee submitting a list of preferred candidates to the Mayor. To get more community input during the recruitment process for the important job of Chief of Police, Deliberative Community Forums were held as a part of the Talent City process.

Throughout the summer of 2014, six Deliberative Community Forums provided residents of Pittsburgh with an opportunity to participate in the process of selecting a new Chief of Police. The City of Pittsburgh is separated into six policing zones with a corresponding resident-led Public Safety Council. Each of these Public Safety Councils hosted one of the forums. During the forums residents shared ideas about improving policing in Pittsburgh, identified their needs and priorities, and discussed the qualities they believe are essential in a new Chief of Police.

The Pittsburgh Foundation hired affiliates of Carnegie Mellon University’s Program for Deliberative Democracy to organize the Deliberative Community Forums. These consultants worked with staff from the Office of the Mayor, the Department of Public Safety, and the Office of Community Affairs (OCA).

Setting an Agenda

The Office of the Mayor and the Department of Public Safety led the development of the forum’s agenda and supplied research and background
information for the development of the forum's Discussion Guide and Survey.

The final agenda asked residents the following questions:

- Do you believe the selection criteria identified by the Mayor will result in his hiring a Chief of Police that will address the needs and priorities of you and your neighbors? Are there other search criteria that you or your community would add?
- What priorities does your community need the new Chief of Police to address?
- What qualities and skills does your community need the new Chief of Police to have?
- What can you and others in your community do to help realize a vision of “Policing in Partnership with the Community”?

Developing Briefing Materials

The forum’s Discussion Guide introduced residents to the Mayor’s vision of “Policing in Partnership with the Community.” To elaborate on this vision, the Discussion Guide explained five criteria that the Mayor expected to use as a guide to his selection of the new Chief of Police.

To develop the Discussion Guide, the selection criteria identified by the Mayor were shared with people outside of his administration who had expertise in policing and police-community relations. These outside experts supplied practical examples to help participants understand what the Mayor’s priorities and criteria might look like in the everyday work of a Chief of Police.

Developing Surveys

The forum’s survey included both closed- and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions asked participants to rank the importance of each of the Mayor’s selection criteria, and to assess the success of the forum. Open-ended questions asked participants to identify priorities
they wanted the Mayor and the Chief of Police to address; to identify qualities and skills they wished the new Chief of Police to possess; and to share ways police officers and residents could work in partnership.

**Recruiting Resource Panel**

The forum’s Resource Panel was the screening committee of community members assembled by Talent City to review applications for the Chief of Police position. This screening committee included a recent Pittsburgh Public School graduate, a foundation president, a court-appointed advocate who had founded the Prevent Another Crime Today Initiative, a researcher (former gang-member-now-academic) from the Center for Health Equity, Department of Behavioral and Community Health Sciences, a professor of law with expertise mediating police-community relations, a former member of the Pittsburgh Citizen Police Review Board, a former Chief of Police of a community adjacent to Pittsburgh, a former president of the Fraternal Order of Police, a deputy director of the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, a deputy warden of the Allegheny County Jail.

At each of the forums, Public Safety Director Steven Bucar and at least five members of the Screening Committee were present to respond to questions from residents.

**Recruiting Participants**

The forums were open to all who wished to participate. Six forums were hosted by each of the resident-led Public Safety Councils in Pittsburgh’s six policing zones. Members of these councils assumed significant responsibility for distributing information and for recruitment of their neighbors. In the month prior to the first forum, staff members from the Mayor’s Office of Community Affairs distributed flyers at community meetings. In addition, the forums were publicized online using e-mail and social media resources. Information about the forums also appeared in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and neighborhood newspapers, such as the South Pittsburgh Reporter. Recruitment activities were supported by the Public Safety Council Presidents, the Office of
Community Affairs, the Public Safety Department’s outreach staff, and the Pittsburgh Police Department’s community resource officers.

Results

Over 240 residents completed exit surveys at the six forums. After each forum, the individual responses provided by participants were reviewed by a staff member in the Office of Mayor Peduto. This staff member created initial reports from each forum that identified the topics, themes, and ideas that emerged from the participants’ responses. Working from these initial reports, consultants affiliated with Carnegie Mellon University’s Program for Deliberative Democracy developed a final report, which was shared with the Mayor, the Public Safety Director, and members of Talent City Screening Committee. Key findings from this report include the following:

• Participants indicated that the deliberative forum was helpful: it enabled them to develop a better understanding of the issues, helped them identify their community’s priorities, and introduced them to perspectives they had not previously considered.

• Based on statements participants shared with the forum’s moderators, participants were engaged in the process; they felt that the forum provided a real opportunity for their voices to be heard and their opinions to be valued.

• Surveys provided validation for the selection criteria proposed by Mayor Peduto, all of the criteria were identified as important by all or almost all participants at every forum.

• No additional or alternative selection criteria were proposed in participants’ exit surveys. However, notes from the forum’s small-group discussions and information shared by the resource panelists suggested an additional selection criterion: Candidate’s ability to develop collaborations with a community’s non-law enforcement agencies.

• Participants identified the following priorities for the new Chief of Police: repairing community-police relations; creating a more diverse
police force with increased visibility in communities; targeting crime reduction on violence, gun use and trafficking, and drug sales.

- The qualities and skills participants identified as important include personal qualities, such as integrity and empathy, and professional skills, including experience both as a rank-and-file officer and as a leader, experience implementing effective community-oriented policing strategies with diverse communities, and experience using technology to prevent and solve crime.

- Participants indicated that citizen involvement in helping to realize a vision of Policing in Partnership with Communities should include the following: citizens should become more engaged and encourage others to engage in block watches and Public Safety Council activities, citizens should work to create relationships of mutual respect between the police force and community members, and citizens should collaborate with police to develop goals and strategies for reducing crime.

- In small-group discussions, participants’ also suggested strategies for developing better police-community relations. Suggestions included informal gatherings, such as “Coffee with Cops” sessions, and special events, such as “Trick or Trunk,” which would involve police officers filling the trunk of their cruisers with candy to distribute at Halloween. In addition, participants suggested more extensive efforts, such as Camp Cadet, which one participant described as a week-long immersive program that would help citizens—especially youth—better understand the job of a police officer.

We used each of our six resident-led police zone public safety councils as venues for deliberations on the selection of a police chief. Among the core values of the zone councils is an open, reasoned and strategic collaboration with public safety officials to keep our neighborhoods and our city safer. The use of the deliberative protocol reinforced this collaborative philosophy.

—Liz Style
Department of Public Safety, Coordinator,
Safer Together Pittsburgh
“Revive Civility and Respect Cities” is a nonpartisan program of the University of Arizona’s National Institute for Civil Discourse (NICD) that works with and encourages communities to restore our values of civility, respect for each other, and respect for facts.

The Revive Civility and Respect Cities program kicks-off with a Mayor’s proclamation, declaring a specific month as that city’s Revive Civility and Respect Month. There are flexible and scalable ways for Mayors and Councils to be involved in any or all steps (see below).

With the Mayor’s support, NICD works with community organizers to provide outreach to the local community. Community members come together to sign a Personal Pledge and participate in a living room or community conversation and/or a Text, Talk, Revive Civility and Respect activity.

The input and ideas provided by community members can be used to develop the next phase of revive civility action in the City. The results are presented to the local media and elected officials, and NICD provides support for community action moving forward.

The Revive Civility and Respect Cities program first started in Tucson, Arizona. Working with Mayor Rothschild, who proclaimed May 2017 as Tucson’s Revive Civility and Respect Month. The program kicked off with a Revive Civility event in April, 2017, with Tucsonans participating in Revive Civility activities during May and will continue throughout 2017 and 2018.

In June, 2017, Mayors from around the country joined Mayor Rothschild in unanimously voting to support “Mayors United to Revive Civility and Respect” at the US Conference of Mayor’s annual meeting in Miami (see Appendix A).

**Step 1: Start with Mayoral Proclamation**

The Mayoral Proclamation provides leadership support for the Revive Civility and Respect Month in the community. See Appendix B for a proclamation sample template. Steps are scalable from easy/light engagement to deep/more robust engagement:

- **Light**
  - Pass Proclamation and announce through media/social media
  - Media interviews/work to elevate stories of civility in your community
  - Dedicate a day or meeting where strengthening civility is core on the agenda
  - Conduct city meetings, adapt policies utilizing civil discourse and deep listening

- **Robust**

**Step 2: Encourage Community Members To Take a Personal Pledge**

The Personal Pledge is a tool for use in community outreach that outlines the actions and activities community members can do to help revive civility in their community. See Appendix C for the Personal Pledge language.

- **Light**
  - Invite community members to take the pledge via social media
  - Email city lists inviting individuals to take personal pledge
  - Media event calling on community members to take the pledge
  - Run a competition - engage neighborhoods/organizations to sign up the most personal pledges (they can be eligible for NICD community mini-grant)
  - Provide a “Reviving Civility and Respect Award” to citizen(s), neighborhood(s), businesses and/or organizations (NICD organizing materials available)
Step 3: Encourage Participation in Revive Civility Conversations

Basic discussion guides and training materials that are easy to use, are available to assist those who wish come together and talk about how to revive civility and respect in their community. These are some of:

- **One on One ("Unlikely Friendship) Conversations**—The 5 minute video "Unlikely Friendships" shows a model for how connections can form across deep political differences; that video should be distributed widely along with basic information about how individuals can do something similar in their community; the conversations that take place when pairs get together will explore areas of common interest and discuss how to promote more civility and respect.

- **Small Group Dialogues**—These small group (6-12 people) conversations will bring together people of different views who usually don't have much contact with each other to talk about how to increase civility and respect. They can take place in living rooms, around a dinner table or in a church or community office. A special focus will be on pairing groups that have something in common, but that have different political views (i.e. church members from different denominations, voters from different parties, students from different organizations, etc.)

- **Trainings on Skills for Civility**—Trainings of different lengths (1-4 sessions) are available for those who want to develop skills needed to listen across differences, practice and promote civility in the community; these trainings can be for people who have divergent views or for groups with similar political views who want to reach out to others.

- **Larger Scale Conversation**—these are large group sessions where different neighborhoods and populations come together around a community issue or concern. The community conversations include skill-building exercises for participants to learn how to have a civil conversation across differences.

- **Text, Talk, and Revive Civility and Respect**—This is an activity that uses text messaging to facilitate a face-to-face conversation on reviving civility. It is particularly effective as an activity for high school or college aged students. Participants gather in small groups (3-4 people) with one cell phone per group and text CIVILITY to 89800 to receive a series of text messages that guides their group through a one-hour conversation on reviving civility.

Robust:

- Publicize Community Conversation and/or Text, Talk Revive Civility Conversations through social media/media
- Open an event - welcome participants at a Community Discussion
- Invite a staff person, council member, or city volunteer to engage with or serve on a community steering committee
- Lead or facilitate a community discussion (NICD has facilitator guides)
- Participate in ongoing relationship building process between policy maker(s), media representatives and community leaders
- Invest city resources in civility endeavors (e.g. community discussion outcomes, trainings, retreats, establish community mini-grants to sustain civility work)
Appendix A: Mayors United to Revive Civility and Respect

Resolution Number: 23 Passed on June 26, 2017

Sponsored by:
The Honorable Jonathan Rothschild, Mayor of Tucson
The Honorable Darrell Steinberg, Mayor of Sacramento
The Honorable Hillary Schieve, Mayor of Reno
The Honorable Jeff Williams, Mayor of Arlington
The Honorable John A. McNally, Mayor of Youngstown
The Honorable John Giles, Mayor of Mesa
The Honorable Lyda Krewson, Mayor of St. Louis
The Honorable Mark R. Holland, Mayor of Kansas City
The Honorable Mark Stodola, Mayor of Little Rock
The Honorable Martin J. Walsh, Mayor of Boston
The Honorable Mitchell J. Landrieu, Mayor of New Orleans
The Honorable Rebecca Casper, Mayor of Idaho Falls
The Honorable Richard J. Berry, Mayor of Albuquerque
The Honorable Roy D. Buol, Mayor of Dubuque
The Honorable Steve Adler, Mayor of Austin
The Honorable Sylvester 'Sly' James Jr., Mayor of Kansas City
The Honorable Ted Wheeler, Mayor of Portland
The Honorable William A. Bell Sr., Mayor of Birmingham
The Honorable Allison Silberberg, Mayor of Alexandria

WHEREAS, The 2016 election left our country feeling more divided than at any time in recent memory and the Weber Shandwick annual nationwide Civility in America Survey indicated that 75 percent of the American public were saying that incivility in America has risen to crisis levels; and

WHEREAS, heated rhetoric and a dramatic shift away from collaboration leaves us unable to solve the challenges confronting our communities; and

WHEREAS, civil discourse is the free and respectful exchange of different ideas in a way that respects and affirms all persons, while hearing their perspectives; and

WHEREAS, members of our communities should feel comfortable and respected while exploring worldviews outside their own; and

WHEREAS, civility reduces rudeness, ridicule, and lack of respect for the open exchange of ideas; and

WHEREAS, civility assists in the process of working together to create lasting solutions to our most pressing challenges, while fostering respect among opposing groups; and

WHEREAS, civility and respect help improve our well-being, restore our trust, and encourage Americans to participate in building a brighter future for generations to come; and

WHEREAS, when people take time to really listen to others who are different from themselves, they often find that there is more in common than they might have thought, including finding ways to work for the greater good together; and

WHEREAS, when Mayors and community members come together across differences, we demonstrate that we are part of communities grounded in hope and possibility and we make great things happen together; and
WHEREAS, there is an urgent desire by many elected leaders and the public for trust, respect and civility to be revived in our democracy; and

WHEREAS, now is a critical time when our cities, states and country need public leaders to stand together with civic courage across partisan lines and Mayors can help set a community tone that fosters civility and respect through our leadership and by our willingness to listen to others of differing perspectives; and

WHEREAS, Mayors and community leaders from large cities to small communities such as Tucson (AZ), San Diego (CA), Austin (TX), Columbus (OH), Upper Arlington (OH), Augusta (ME), Bangor (ME), Biddeford (ME), Bar Harbor (ME) and others, are leading an initiative to Revive Civility and Respect,

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that The United States Conference of Mayors calls on all Mayors and communities nationwide to join the initiative to Revive Civility and Respect and become visible ambassadors of civility, listen respectfully to people who have different views, support efforts to work together across ideological and political lines, and work to rebuild civic trust through civil discourse.
Appendix B: Mayoral Proclamation Sample

PROCLAMATION

CITY OF TUCSON • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

WHEREAS, civility reduces, rudeness, ridicule, and lack of respect for the open exchange of ideas, and

WHEREAS, civility improves our well-being, restores trust, and encourages Americans to participate in building a brighter future for generations to come; and

WHEREAS, civility assists in the process of working together to create lasting solutions to our most pressing challenges, while fostering respect among opposing groups; and

WHEREAS, community members should feel comfortable and respected while exploring worldviews outside their own; and

WHEREAS, The University of Arizona’s National Institute for Civil Discourse headquartered in Tucson and Washington, D.C., was created for the purpose of reviving and restoring civility to achieve a higher quality of public discourse;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Jonathan Rothschild, Mayor of the City of Tucson, Arizona do hereby proclaim May 2017 to be

REVIVE CIVILITY MONTH

in this community, and encourage all our citizens to exercise civility and respect toward each other.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the City of Tucson, Arizona to be affixed this 1st day of January, 2017.

Jonathan Rothschild, Mayor

ATTEST:

Roger Randolph, City Clerk
WHEREAS, civil discourse is the free and respectful exchange of different ideas in a way that respects and affirms all persons, while hearing their perspectives; and

WHEREAS, heated rhetoric and a dramatic shift away from collaboration leaves us unable to solve the challenges confronting our community; and

WHEREAS, civility reduces rudeness, ridicule, and lack of respect for the open exchange of ideas; and

WHEREAS, civility improves our well-being, restores trust, and encourages Americans to participate in building a brighter future for generations to come; and

WHEREAS, civility assists in the process of working together to create lasting solutions to our most pressing challenges, while fostering respect among opposing groups; and

WHEREAS, community members should feel comfortable and respected while exploring worldviews outside their own; and

WHEREAS, recognizing the importance of civility and how it improves personal relationships leading to greater civil discourse, in recognition of the University of Arizona’s National Institute for Civil Discourse’s initiative, would like to invite all members of our community to exercise civility and respect toward each other and participate in reviving civility together.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, [Name of Mayor], Mayor of the City of [City Name, State] do hereby proclaim [Month], 2017, to be REVIVE CIVILITY MONTH in this community and encourage all residents to practice civility by listening respectfully to people who have different views, avoiding language that is insulting or derogatory to others and supporting efforts to work together across ideological and political lines.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the City of [City Name, State] to be affixed this [XX day] of [Month], 2017.

[Name], Mayor (or appropriate official)
Appendix C: Personal Pledge to Revive Civility

To help revive civility and respect in my community, I will:

1. Seek out a variety of reliable news sources in order to learn more about the forces that divide--and also unite--our country.
2. Listen respectfully and seek to avoid stereotypes or caricatures of people who have different views than my own.
3. Encourage and support efforts to bring people of different points of view together in our community to have civil and respectful conversations.
4. Invite other people to join me in the Revive Civility Initiative and get involved in helping to connect people across political divisions.

Pledge is located on NICD website http://nicd.arizona.edu/revivecivility
Richmond Times-Dispatch

Commission maps next steps for gathering feedback on Confederate statues in Richmond

By Mark Robinson

Richmond Times-Dispatch | Nov 14, 2017

RICHMOND — Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney’s Monument Avenue Commission will hold a series of small group meetings at the request of community organizations beginning in January to gather input on what course of action the city should take on the Confederate monuments lining Monument Avenue.

The commission settled on the next step in its public engagement process during a work session Tuesday night at the Library of Virginia, its first public meeting since Stoney postponed a September hearing because of safety concerns. More than 80 people sat in on Tuesday’s meeting. No public comment period was scheduled.

Christy Coleman, the commission’s co-chair and CEO of the American Civil War Museum, explained at the outset why the commission postponed its work, citing the August white nationalist rally in Charlottesville.

“As we all know, our nation has been in a bit of a crisis in the last two months around this question,” Coleman said. “In our own state we’ve seen some real ugliness, and we all needed a little bit of time to step back and breathe and be as thoughtful as possible as we continue this process.”

In July, Stoney formed the 10-person panel of academics, historians and members of the council and the community. He charged it with recommending how the city could “add context” to Monument Avenue, an approach the mayor said at the time was preferable to removing or relocating the monuments.
After Charlottesville, Stoney expanded the commission’s charge to include a consideration of removal or relocation.

Commission members did not discuss the merits of either course at Tuesday’s work session. Instead, they received a briefing on the city’s legal position to alter or move the statues, reviewed a sampling of letters received from citizens on the matter, and weighed how it could generate more feedback to inform its final recommendations to the mayor.

Since the commission’s September hearing was postponed, its members have fielded requests from heritage, preservation, social justice, faith-based and other groups seeking to talk about the issue, Coleman said.

Several members have obliged and reported back that the smaller settings produced more thoughtful feedback than what came out of the commission’s public hearing in August, she said.

The commission’s August event drew a capacity crowd of more than 500 people to the Virginia Historical Society, and many more were turned away. The two-hour affair was heated, and organizers struggled to keep the proceedings civil.

Gregg Kimball, the commission’s other co-chair and director of education and outreach for the Library of Virginia, lobbied for the new approach, which he said would better serve the commission than simply holding more town-hall style meetings on what is a divisive issue.

“I did not find that very useful,” Kimball said, referring to the commission’s August hearing.

“The idea is that we should be promoting dialogue. This is a much more effective way to do that.”

The meetings, which the mayor’s office will schedule at the request of an interested organization, will take place from January to April.

In addition to the small-group meetings, the commission will continue to gather written input through the mail and on its website.

It has received more than 1,200 emails and letters from people on the issue, which it is cataloguing in a database that it will publicly release, Coleman said.

The commission aims to make its final recommendations to the mayor by next May, Coleman said.
Summary of the
League of Minnesota Cities and
Minnesota City/County Management Association
Joint Task Force Report on Civility

What contributes to incivility?

- Lack of Community Vision or Conflict Among Visions
- Specific Development or Redevelopment Issue
- Financial Crisis
- Hidden Agendas
- Role Confusion and Power Conflicts between Mayors (or County Board Chairs), Other Governing Body Members, and Staff
- Lack of Respect for the Breath of Responsibilities of the Office
- Lack of Mutual Support between Elected Officials and Staff
- Personal Power and Individual Aggrandizement
- Ideological Commitment and Partisan Politics
- Illegal or Unethical Behavior by City Officials
- Politics and Media
- Odd Year Elections
- Smaller Catalysts: These include a lack of good interpersonal and communications skills to downright rudeness, the intrusion of personal mobile devices into the council or board meeting setting, differences in generational values, diminishing resources that require increasingly difficult tradeoffs in service or program delivery, a lack of transparency and timely communication between the city and residents, and the ripple effects from personal and organizational devastation caused by the Great Recession.

What are the costs of Incivility?

- Cities and counties are unable to function effectively and efficiently in dealing with routine business, much less new and important community priorities.
- Incivility at city hall or the county courthouse can spill over into the community itself creating a toxic political environment that makes it even more difficult to find the consensus necessary to address urgent priorities.
- Local governments do not approach each other for collaboration because of loss of trust.
- Lack of citizen and media trust and confidence in their own local government or local governments in general.
- Lack of citizen willingness in running for and serving on a local governing body – the “who needs that?” factor.
- Loss of talented staff that are fired or just resign in frustration. Subsequent difficulties in recruiting replacement staff that have the necessary skills and competencies.
- Lack of interest by talented young people in working for the particular city or county, or even in pursuing a career in local government at all.
• Action by the legislature or even Congress to mandate or limit future local government actions based on the misfeasance of a few.
• Loss of private investment, new business locations, grant opportunities, and lowered bond ratings in a locality that is perceived as potentially hostile or politically unstable or where people are uncertain that the usual norms for fair decision-making are operating because investors perceive there will be too much work and time required to navigate the issues.
• Neglect of infrastructure investment and maintenance or a loss of time to address important issues when the behavior of certain individuals prevents the governing body from proceeding.
• Issues of personal health and well-being for city and county officials, staff and others caused by the stresses of incivility.
• Actual monetary losses when the League of Minnesota Cities Insurance Trust (LMCIT), or the Minnesota Counties Intergovernmental Trust incur losses when one of their members is suffering from excessive conflict. According to LMCIT, cities in this situation consume a disproportionate share of staff time, including underwriting and claims support, but also research, human resources, and other services for which LMCIT bears a share of the cost.

What steps can Local Governments take?
• Make sure the elected officials, and city or county staff clearly understand their respective roles, responsibilities, and authorities
• Support, don’t undermine, the role of the chief presiding officer (mayor or county board chair) at meetings of the governance body
• Set an expectation of civility for all who participate in governing body meetings
• Build the City Team
• Continually bring community attention to the issue of incivility
• Get better at telling the city story, and in talking publicly and early about both accomplishments and potentially controversial projects
• Adopt effective citizen engagement strategies and take time to build a broad base of support for city projects
• Consider adopting a code of ethics and/or a statement of aspirational values for the city or county
• See that the chief executive officer has understanding and training in the role that he or she can play to prevent incivility or, equally important, how to help resolve it once it happens.

The full report, including recommendations to the League Board, is available on the League’s website at: www.lmc.org/civility

A new collection of resources on preventing incivility, identifying its root causes, and address it is also available.
Dubuque: Creating a Culture of Engagement

In January 1982, Dubuque, Iowa, had the highest unemployment rate in the country, at 23 percent. This was, in large part, due to two major manufacturers, John Deere and the Dubuque Packing Company, substantially reducing employment. Residents began to leave, and following a population loss of 7.8 percent from 1980 to 1990, a local business released a t-shirt reading “Will the last one leaving Dubuque please turn out the lights?” A diminished tax base, abandoned downtown storefronts, falling home prices, and aging infrastructure such as streets, the riverfront area, and sewer and water systems plagued Dubuque in the 1980s. The city had the highest unemployment rate of Iowa’s largest cities, and it lost retail business as well as industry. Ten percent of its housing was vacant or for sale. These dire economic circumstances gave Dubuque two choices: wait for the national economy to recover or invest in a new vision.

Dubuque’s private and public sector leaders came together to help restore Dubuque and invest in downtown redevelopment and industrial expansion. Several collaborative institutions were created by this group including Dubuque Infuturo (now Dubuque Initiatives), Greater Dubuque Development Corporation (www.greaterdubuque.org), the Dubuque Racing Association, and Dubuque Main Street (www.dubuquemainstreet.org). In 1991, the city helped establish the first of Dubuque’s visioning processes—Envision 2000. This visioning process took place for the Tri-State area and involved over 5,000 citizens. Building off the policies, goals, and objectives of the Vision 2000 process, in 1995 the Dubuque City Council approved the first Comprehensive Plan for the city since 1936. The success of Vision 2000 in creating the Comprehensive Plan paved the road for visioning efforts to become part of Dubuque’s civic DNA. Shortly after the adoption of the 1995 Comprehensive Plan, the America’s River Vision effort was launched.

Developing partnerships and creating broader collaborations became the new norm for the Dubuque area following successful visioning efforts in the early 1990s. The next issue to tackle for the community was the Port of Dubuque. With run-down buildings, deserted storage tanks, and polluted ground, the Port of Dubuque was not being leveraged to benefit the community recreationally or economically. The Dubuque County Historical Society preserves and educates the history of Dubuque and Mississippi River. In the early 1990s, the group began to envision an expansion on the riverfront and sought out partners to make it a reality. Wanting to boost the community spirit and revitalize the economy, local government, businesses, and nonprofit organizations saw this as the perfect opportunity to reach their common goal. What began as a $25 million project, quickly grew to $188 million with the outpouring of support from the community to complete phase I in 2003. Improvements included The Mississippi Riverwalk, the Indoor Water Park, the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium, the Grand River Center, the Grand Harbor Resort, and the historic Star Brewery complex.

The America’s River Project showcased the success that can happen when private and public partnerships are leveraged, but the city knew they wanted to take the community to the next level with bigger ideas. The city staff asked themselves how they could better engage the community and let citizens drive the vision. Assistant City Manager Cindy Steinhauser commented that their unsuccessful bid for the All-America City Award in 1996 helped them realize that the group was focused internally and did not reach out of their comfort zone for input. Branching out from the institutional usual suspects would help mobilize the community to its fullest potential. She describes the time period of beginning in 2005 as the time of “engaged community.”

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In 2005, the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque (www.dbqfoundation.org) and the Dubuque Area Chamber of Commerce (www.dubuquechamber.com) spearheaded the Envision 2010 campaign to directly engage residents in planning for Dubuque’s future. The end product would be 10 Big Ideas with broad acceptance that would have a long-term, positive impact on the growth and quality of life of the greater Dubuque community. The process produced over 2,000 ideas through focus groups and town meetings attended by thousands. After a nine-month process, the final 10 Big Ideas were released in January 2006: (1) America’s River Phase II, (2) Bilingual Education Curriculum, (3) Community-wide Wireless, (4) Community Health Center, (5) Indoor and Outdoor Performing Arts Center, (6) Integrated Walking/Biking/Hiking Trail System, (7) Library Services Expansion, (8) Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, (9) Passenger Train Service, and (10) Warehouse District Revitalization.

Each project has been completed or is underway with a group of 100-plus active volunteers continuing to help make them a reality. From the beginning, the creation of an inclusive process that enabled citizens to name the things they considered valuable was just as important as accomplishing the goals of the final plan. The process aimed to set up mechanisms for citizens to be involved easily in planning and to create a meaningful engagement and implementation experience that mutually benefited the community and the residents. Envision 2010 was also an avenue for new leadership and talent to emerge to help shape the community. This process was the catalyst from many community groups and projects outside of the 10 Big Ideas.

After serving 10 years on the city council, Roy D. Buol ran for the office of mayor in 2005. His platform was based on “engaging citizens as partners,” and what he heard from thousands of citizens was a consistent theme surrounding water quality, recycling, green space, public transit, cultural vitality, accessibility, and downtown revitalization. During the 2006 city council goal-setting process, Mayor Buol proposed and received full support from his council colleagues to focus on sustainability as a top priority, which would have competitive economic advantages in the future. What soon became known as Sustainable Dubuque is a city council-adopted, community-created, and citizen-led initiative whose story officially began in 2006. A city council priority each year since, the city continually works to expand awareness, create partnerships, and encourage initiatives involving all sectors of the community.

Sustainable Dubuque created 12 guiding principles for a sustainable future: Regional Economy, Smart Energy Use, Resource Management, Community Design, Green Buildings, Healthy Local Foods, Community Knowledge, Reasonable Mobility, Healthy Air, Clean Water, Native Plants and Animals, and Community Health and Safety. Steinhauser attributes the success of the initiative, reflected by a Green Asset Map that illustrates accomplishments in such areas as transportation, healthy homes, local food, arts and culture, jobs, and energy independence, to its community-generated variety.

The success of the Sustainable Dubuque Initiative is also in part to the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque’s Dubuque 2.0 project (now a part of the Sustainable Dubuque Initiative). The foundation creatively engaged residents to learn about the environment and the impact on their local community. A website was created featuring games, contests, and other ways for community members to get involved and learn more about sustainability issues. Offline engagement efforts at places like farmers markets and cultural events connected more community members by capitalizing on already popular gathering spaces. Armed with more knowledge about sustainability efforts, residents were able to make informed decisions that helped reduce their water usage by 6.6 percent on average, and 69 percent of Dubuque 2.0 website users indicated that they were doing more to promote sustainability in their own lives and throughout the community. The traditional engagement model of a citizen-led taskforce coupled with the creative, grassroots outreach from the Community Foundation created the successful initiative that has won the community many awards and continues to be a proud piece of Dubuque’s identity.

With a decade of increased civic engagement and a variety of successful projects, city staff decided it was time to apply again for the All-America City Award to be recognized for their efforts, continue
learning from other communities on engagement practices, and to boost their community pride and spirit. Having learned from their unsuccessful bid in 1996, the group created a new process to complete the application that mirrored how they had approached engagement since then: (1) gathering partners, (2) getting commitments, (3) identifying short-term and long-term issues, (4) assessing strengths, (5) analyzing who is missing from the table, and (6) gaining broad community input and buy-in. This time around staff was particularly interested in youth input. From the beginning of the application process, they saw involving youth as a critical component to create “co-learning” between the youth and adults of the community.

The campaign to apply for the award was kicked off to the broader community by asking citizens, “What do you think makes us an All-America City?” With this input, the application and presentation group submitted a more inclusive and collaborative application and was named an All-America City in 2007. Steinhauser commented that the application process proved to community members that their ideas and hard work over the previous decade had become a reality and improved the quality of life in Dubuque. The process helped community members tell the Dubuque story and see their connection to it, which boosted community confidence after winning the award.

In 2012, Dubuque was moved to action again when they learned of the focus on 3rd grade reading for the 2012 All-America City Award. This was an opportunity to rally the community around support for their children and education. Every Child/Every Promise, a new affiliate of the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque, launched the effort around the sentiment that everyone in the community had a role to play by asking, “How can you connect to 3rd grade reading?” The answers from unsuspecting education players pushed the action plan farther than the community could have imagined. One example came from a probation officer who recommends community service requirements to the juvenile court judge. He committed to recommend hours of service be dedicated to reading and mentoring elementary school students. Steinhauser explains that by giving people the opportunity to connect to a shared vision and commit to it in a way they are most comfortable the strengths of residents can be better leveraged to create a stronger community for everyone. This authentic form of engagement helped Dubuque win a 2012- and a 2013 All-America City designation.

The city’s process for engagement continues to develop and evolve based on experience and projects. The city recognized the value of coordinated efforts of engagement beginning with the planning stage in part due to the Bee Branch Watershed Flood Mitigation project that will help provide relief for approximately 500 homes and businesses in an area that has experienced six Presidential Disaster Declarations since 1999 costing an estimated $70 million. According to one city staff member, a consultant was hired to create a plan to restore the Bee Branch area. After releasing the plan to the public, the city received a lot of backlash. The city responded to their concerns and hired a new consultant who conducted extensive outreach in the neighborhood with community members while compiling the plan. As a result, residents reported feeling included in making decisions about the $200 million project and felt that their needs were being met in those circumstances. Two prime examples of the community acceptance were the implementation of a storm-water management fee and that over 100 properties were acquired to daylight the Bee Branch creek without using eminent domain through the courts.

Since the 1980s, Dubuque has moved from one-off engagement and visioning projects to integrating community engagement throughout local government projects. In 2012, the city increased its civic resources by hiring their first Community Engagement Coordinator to continue streamlining and advancing engagement efforts to ensure that citizen’s needs were being met. One program run by the coordinator is City Life. Dubuque’s Safe Community Task Force identified the need for a group of informed citizens who understand the organizational structure of local government and how best to connect to departments to act as a welcoming liaison to the community. After much research, the Human Rights Department (which includes the Community Engagement Coordinator) created Dubuque’s version of a “citizen academy” in 2013 which they named City Life. According to the coordinator, the fourth time they offered the program
the number of interested participants dropped from 22 to 5. By applying a community engagement framework that involved 50-plus stakeholders that captured how citizens viewed engagement, the program was redesigned and the enrollment rate returned to 20-plus participants. The Community Engagement Coordinator has also assisted with the Inclusive Dubuque Campaign which began in 2013.

Dubuque’s racial and ethnic composition shifted in the period 2000 to 2010. According to the 2000 Census, Dubuque was 96.2 percent white, 1.6 percent Latino, and 1.2 percent black compared to the 2010 Census, which reported Dubuque’s population as 91.7 percent white, 2.4 percent Latino, and 4.0 percent black. This shift was naturally reflected in the workforce and employees brought to their employers’ attention that they did not feel welcome or connected to the community of Dubuque. The business community, the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque, local not-for-profits, and local government worked together to help address the issue by creating Inclusive Dubuque.

Inclusive Dubuque, which aims “to have a community where people feel respected, valued, and engaged,” deploys a collective impact model involving more than 50 network partners that span all sectors and meet monthly. The initiative gathers demographic data, conducts surveys, and convenes community dialogues, focusing on housing, economic wellbeing, education, health, safe neighborhoods, transportation, and arts and culture. The initiative defines diversity as, including but not limited to, (1) age or generation, (2) culture, (3) disabilities, (4) gender, (5) nationality, (6) race and ethnicity, (7) religion, (8) sexual orientation, (9) socioeconomic status, and (10) veteran status. After determining the various identities that factor into diversity, defined as the “unique perspectives and life experiences an individual or group brings to our community” and reflected by the characteristics listed previously, Inclusive Dubuque will incorporate inclusiveness practices into its community discussions and solutions. Finally, the initiative aims to achieve equity and access to opportunities for all and to the resources needed to thrive.

The need for Inclusive Dubuque demonstrated that accounting for who was and was not at the decision table was an important piece of any visioning or strategic planning process and that building trust with groups left out was needed. The local government’s Human Rights Department has taken on this concern and is addressing it in their creation of an Equity and Engagement Toolkit. This is part of the city’s efforts, as one of the Inclusive Dubuque Network Partners, to provide mutually reinforcing activities in the collective impact model to achieve the agreed-upon goals. Preparation of the toolkit began when a cross-departmental local government team created a shared meaning of engagement in the context of Dubuque’s local government. The toolkit will touch on every aspect of engagement including how to choose stakeholders, designing around limitation of participants, and when to use different engagement tools. An important section of the toolkit, “Reachin,” will prompt project coordinators to compare their stakeholder list to the toolkit’s list of diverse groups to consider. A section later in the process will ask coordinators if they feel comfortable working with specific diverse groups, if they know how to contact them, and if they know what that group’s needs are. If no is the answer to any of those questions, a meeting with the Human Relations Specialist will be scheduled to provide assistance. The toolkit aims to ask the right questions to trigger a thoughtful look at inclusion and equity in decision making. The toolkit is still in the development phase and will be tested on several different projects and presented to the public for input before finalizing.

The local government in Dubuque continually attempts to improve their engagement efforts by organizing their civic actions, so that they complement each other and engage people to learn together along the way. Spurred by a depressed economy, Dubuque leveraged partnerships and citizen’s strengths to put the city back on the map. The evolution of their visioning process to address challenges and emphasize partnerships has led to broader engagement and more sustainable solutions for the community at large.

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TACKLING WICKED PROBLEMS THROUGH DELIBERATIVE ENGAGEMENT

A revolution is beginning to occur in public engagement, fueled by the growing distrust and cynicism in our communities, the increasing limitations of more traditional communication models and problem-solving processes that are no longer up to the task, and the growing realization that we can do much better. Currently, there are two dominant models of public problem-solving: One focuses on expertise, the other on advocacy.

Communities often have significant resources for expert problem-solving, including municipal staff, as well as ample capacity for adversarial politics, such as the trappings of partisan party politics, interest groups (which can now spring up overnight due to social media), and influential activists. Such experts and activists are critical resources for community problem-solving, but they are not sufficient, particularly for the growing class of problems that practitioners have labeled “wicked problems.”

In important ways, over-reliance on experts and advocates can often make tackling these problems even more difficult, fueling a negative feedback loop of the polarization, cynicism, and apathy that have unfortunately come to define our political culture.

The age of wicked problems

Wicked problems have no technical solutions, primarily because they involve competing underlying values and paradoxes that require either tough choices between opposing goods or innovative ideas that can transcend the inherent tensions. Addressing them well also often requires adaptive change — changes in behavior or culture from a broad range of potential actors — that neither expert nor adversarial processes tend to support.

Wicked problems cannot be solved through research, particularly research that attempts to divide them into manageable, disciplinary parts. Research certainly can provide more clarity about the tough choices that need to be made, but cannot make those choices self-evident. Adversarial tactics, especially those that rely on strategic communication framed around narrow key values and “good-versus-evil” or “us-versus-them” frameworks, often create mutual misunderstanding and undue polarization, and tend to make wicked problems even more diabolical, primarily because they often avoid the reality of tough choices and rely on magic bullets or affixing blame for the problem on opposing devil figures.

Such tactics are simplistic and counterproductive to community problem-solving.

Wicked problems actually cannot be “solved” in the sense that a solution can be implemented that would serve in the long term to overcome the tensions. The inherent tensions between key American values such as individual responsibility, equality, justice, safety, and freedom for current and future generations cannot be resolved — only negotiated in better or worse ways. Likewise, the tensions between economic, environmental, and social goods will always be uneasy.

Every complex issue has its own set of underlying competing values. Taken one at a time, each value is generally broadly supported, but the issue is not whether people hold particular individual values or not (is anyone really “anti-freedom” or “anti-safety”?), it is how they rank the values and address the tensions among them. Unfortunately, public discourse hardly ever focuses on the tensions, which are the real issue. Instead, we tend to hear disconnected voices narrowly espousing the different values talking past each other.

Addressing wicked problems calls for a third type of public problem-solving: deliberative engagement. Deliberative
engagement begins with the recognition of the underlying values inherent to public problems, and focuses on developing mutual understanding and genuine interaction across perspectives, which then provides a base to support the constant adjustment, negotiation, and creativity required to tackle wicked problems. This constant process of adjustment represents the essence of a 21st-century democracy. Such a perspective envisions democracy as an ongoing collaborative process of constant communication and negotiation focused on solving common problems, rather than an adversarial zero-sum exercise between stable, competing interests, or a technocratic world of experts searching for the best solutions. It offers a much more effective model to address wicked problems and handle the complexities of diverse democracies, but it requires rather extensive community capacity as well as a cultural shift away from an over-reliance on either expert or adversarial processes. Said differently, such a vision requires high-quality communication about difficult issues, and the current quality of our public communication and civic engagement often falls woefully short. The bottom line is that due to the prevalence of wicked problems, the quality of our local communities will be directly related to the quality of our public discourse, and we know of much better ways to handle public discourse.

Working through “The Groan Zone”

Consider, for example, the work of Sam Kaner and his associates, who developed the “diamond of group decision-making” in their Facilitator’s Guide to Participatory Decision Making. They argued that ideally a difficult decision-making process must go through three stages, each with its own barrier to overcome and strategy for engagement (see below).

The first stage calls for divergent thinking. Too often, processes squelch dissent or do not allow enough voices in the room, and decisions are therefore weakened as false consensus can develop. Or publics are engaged too late, so the issue is already artificially narrowed. To defend against that, municipalities need processes that can help ensure sufficient divergent thinking from the beginning. The good news is that there are currently plenty of community resources to support this stage. Whether it is citizen comment during city council meetings, public hearings, emails to lawmakers, local newspapers, or the growing number of blogs, the free speech tradition in the United States tends to naturally allow for broad divergent thinking. Whether decision-makers fairly consider all the voices may be a different story, but the main point here is that currently most communities handle this stage adequately.
Municipalities should consider three ways to build deliberative capacity:

increase the deliberative nature of internal city processes;

work to make official city public engagement processes more deliberative and interactive; and help build capacity within the broader community.

The problem is that if you successfully allow sufficient divergent thinking, you face the problem of having many voices and perspectives in play, which can be difficult to handle. Kaner aptly labeled this “The Groan Zone.” The second stage — working through the groan zone — requires a very different form of communication than the first. People need to interact and listen to each other. They need to develop an understanding of the issue as a wicked problem. They need to ask good questions, and be provided with good information that frames the issue productively. Most importantly, they need to engage the tensions, and struggle with the best way to address them.

Without sufficient interaction and understanding among broad perspectives, the pitfall of false polarization can occur. Public discourse becomes a loud cacophony of voices with everyone shouting, but no one listening. Unfortunately, the dominant public engagement processes communities often rely on tend to work pretty well for divergent thinking, but very poorly for working through. How much listening or productive interaction occurs during citizen comment? At public hearings? Open houses? Online? How many genuine conversations are sparked where real learning occurs?

Working through tends to require smaller groups, ideally arranged in a circle, working with a facilitator and through material specifically prepared to nurture deliberative engagement. It also tends to require engagement earlier in the process, so participants can be a part of framing the problem itself and discovering potential treatments, rather than simply supporting or opposing a specific solution. Such engagement requires more preparation and a broad range of skill sets, such as issue framing, convening, process design, and facilitation. It also requires that organizers give up some control of the message, symbolizing what the International Association of Public Participation has termed the move from PR (public relations) to P2 (public participation).

A third obstacle can arise on the back end of the groan zone. The third stage — convergent thinking — requires people to prioritize, work toward a decision, and move to action. Once understanding begins to develop during the working-through stage, participants let go of their simplistic “good versus evil” frames and recognize the inherent complexity of the issue. Such learning also has the effect of making decision-making more difficult. Groups can now fall into paralysis by analysis. One advantage of simplistic frames is that they motivate behavior and keep people engaged. Without such a frame, the move to action is much more difficult, but we cannot simply talk forever. This third stage thus requires a set of engagement processes that can help communities react to the tensions by prioritizing, innovating, and sparking collaborative action. Recall that wicked problems often require adaptive changes from a broader range of actors. Ideally, the convergent stage includes many of those actors, and opens up discussion to creative means that cut across individual, public, private, and nonprofit lines.

Application to municipal governance

Due to the reality of wicked problems, communities need to build capacity for deliberative engagement to assist with all three stages. Municipal government is obviously a key player in such capacity, but due to the nature of wicked problems, the conversation must also range beyond them. Policy changes and city budget allocations are only a couple of options in a vast range of potential actions to address wicked problems; therefore, conversations need to be framed much more broadly than “What should city government do?” Municipalities should consider three ways to build deliberative capacity: increase the deliberative nature of internal city processes; work to make official city public engagement processes more deliberative and interactive; and help build capacity within the broader community.

The first shift would impact both council deliberations and how municipal staff researches, infusing both with a recognition of wicked problems, a recognition of the limits of expert and adversarial models, and the need for robust deliberation. Many cities and towns may already do this well. Indeed, some councils may see themselves as the entity that must “work through” the groan zone and make the tough decisions, not the public. From this perspective, the fact that most public engagement focuses only on the divergent opinion stage — gathering input from multiple sources — is not problematic because the council itself serves as the deliberating body. For many, expecting the public to do the
The challenge to municipalities now will be to build a culture of engagement in their communities so that they can attract broader audiences, not just the advocates for particular positions. 

working through seems unrealistic. In general, this perspective has merit. It is the basis for representative government, and can work on certain issues when the public trusts the council. Due to the wickedness of problems, however, issues arise at all three stages when we leave most of the work to representative bodies, regardless of how well they may deliberate themselves. In the first stage, not enough divergent opinion may be considered by the council if concerted efforts are not made to seek out voices and respect dispersed expertise. At the second stage, if they do not bring the public along during the working-through process, council decisions may not be understood or considered legitimate, especially with polarizing issues. Most importantly, if too much of the heavy lifting is left to experts or the council, the third stage — convergent thinking — is woefully limited. The adaptive changes and broad range of actions so critical to addressing wicked problems require shared responsibility and ownership by the public. Those cannot be dictated to them by the council. If citizens simply provide their opinions on the front end and then hear the final decision on the back end, without going through the groan zone themselves, problems will ensue.

The second shift involves ranging beyond the traditional forms of public engagement that tend to focus on one-way exchanges of information (see below). Public engagement of wicked problems needs to involve a broader range of stakeholders interacting with each other, not just given a chance to express their individual opinions. Most traditional forms of engagement primarily attract the usual suspects or those with already entrenched opinions, leaving the vast majority in the middle disengaged. Citizens rarely approach the microphone at council or board meetings or write letters to the editor to explain that they have sympathy for various approaches to the issue and are still trying to work through the implications and negotiate the tensions. Instead, the voices that are heard are those with a clear — but often simplistic and at times scripted by others — view of the matter. Again, alternative voices simply talk past each other without significant interaction or mutual understanding. The challenge to municipalities now will be to build a culture of engagement in their communities so that they can attract broader audiences, not just the advocates for particular positions.

The good news is that deliberative engagement has been shown to create a positive feedback loop, increasing trust, decreasing cynicism, and making it more likely that people will return. Involving citizens earlier in the process to help define the issue and imagine potential responses also engages them as problem-solvers and innovators — roles many will relish — rather than simply as supporters or complainers. People are yearning for genuine, meaningful engagement, something that traditional forms of engagement rarely deliver.

The third way to build capacity ranges beyond municipal government. Just shifting official public engagement processes to a more deliberative model is not enough. Addressing wicked problems requires a broad range of treatments, adaptive changes, and collaborations across public, private, and nonprofit lines. Municipal government can therefore serve as a catalyst or a convener of these broader processes, but often they will need to give up some control and simply be part of a broader

TRADITIONAL FORMS OF MUNICIPAL PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Inform / Persuade

Input

Interact

Citizens
conversation. Fortunately, there has been a growing movement that cities and towns can tap into to build their capacity in deliberative engagement at all three of these levels.

The deliberative democracy movement

The deliberative democracy movement is a conglomeration of academics, practitioners, civic entrepreneurs, and national and international organizations dedicated to developing the capacity to support deliberative practice and infuse our communities with genuine opportunities to tackle wicked problems, "work through" tough issues, form more nuanced public judgments, and support more inclusive civic action and public policies. These individuals and organizations are essentially resources for "passionate impartiality." They are passionate about democracy, about solving problems, and about improving their communities, but nonetheless take a more impartial, process-oriented, and supportive stance on how that may be accomplished. They are focused on improving the conversation and bringing people together, rather than advocating for particular points of view.

The National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (www.ncdd.org) serves as an umbrella organization for this sort of work, while organizations like Public Agenda, the Kettering Foundation, Everyday Democracy, AmericaSpeaks, the International Association of Public Participation, and the Deliberative Democracy Consortium all readily provide useful resources (see author’s note at end of article). Numerous trainings are available. The National League of Cities, the Institute for Local Government, and the Alliance for Innovation also have produced material specifically targeted for municipal use. For a list of key deliberative engagement resources for municipalities, visit www.cpd.colostate.edu/cmlresources.pdf.

In local communities, there are a number of places where deliberative capacity is being built. Organizations like the United Way, community foundations, and public libraries are often great resources for passionate impartiality. More and more nonprofit firms, such as Civic Results in Denver, provide these services. Lastly, there is a growing number of centers and institutes tied to this work at colleges and universities across the country, such as the Institute for the Common Good at Regis University, and the Center for Public Deliberation at Colorado State University.

Author’s note: I oversee the Center for Public Deliberation (CPD) at Colorado State University (CSU), which trains undergraduate students as small group facilitators, then designs and runs various deliberative projects for local cities, school districts, and community organizations, providing critical capacity for deliberative engagement. We also are partnering with CSU’s extension program, as well as other institutions of higher learning, to build such capacity across the state. As the state’s land grant university, CSU has a mission to serve Colorado, and the CPD hopes to serve as a statewide hub and resource for deliberative engagement, with the goal of making Colorado the most democratically advanced state in the nation.
About Conversation Corps

Mission
Conversation Corps engages the people of Austin in meaningful civic dialogue focused on public issues, hosted by community volunteers across the entire city.

Vision
Conversation Corps envisions an Austin in which everyone has the opportunity to participate in important conversations about our community where they live, work and play.

How it works
Anyone can become a member of Conversation Corps! Join us, and bring meaningful dialogue into your everyday life.

- **Training**
  We provide a free, half-day training workshop for anyone who wants to use dialogue to shape our community. You can either:
  - Attend one of our regularly scheduled trainings
  - Request a special training for your work team, neighborhood association, community organization or any other group of people that you'd like to get together. We'll come to you!

- **Hosting**
  Once you've completed a training, you are ready to start hosting conversations! We provide you with:
  - An overview of the topics our partner agencies would like to discuss with the community; there are often several topics available at the same time for hosts to choose from.
- A facilitator guide that walks you through the conversation you will facilitate.
- A form to use for submitting a conversation summary back to us.
- Options for where to host:
  - Public venues such as cafes, houses of worship, libraries and community centers
  - Community organizations who meet regularly and would like to include a conversation as part of their meetings
  - Large events where we can set up a “pop-up” conversational space (booth, etc.)
  - Your place of work (during lunch, after hours, etc.)
  - At the dinner table or other gatherings of friends, family and neighbors

- **Feedback Loop**
  We take feedback from conversations and share it with decision-makers at one or more of the three partner agencies. Then, we’ll keep everyone in the loop about how feedback was used. Visit our Conversations page to see a list of the topics we’ve explored in the past, along with what agencies did with the feedback they received.

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**Partners**
Conversation Corps is a partnership between the City of Austin, AISD and Capital Metro, administered by Leadership Austin.
April 2016: Your Mobility Priorities

Background

Mayor Adler declared 2016 as the “year of mobility,” and the Austin City Council has been looking at different ways of alleviating mobility issue that we see in Austin. Council Resolution No. 20160211-017 directed the City Manager to get feedback from a diverse group of people all across this city about their mobility priorities. As a part of the City’s Mobility Talks initiative, Conversation Corps led small discussions throughout Austin to help inform the larger dialogue. The conversations focused on four general priority categories, which were created based on previous public input:

- manage congestion
- improve safety
- improve connections in my neighborhood
- improve the quality of my streets

Participants were asked:

- When considering these four categories,
- What kinds of tradeoffs would you be willing to accept in exchange for those improvements?
- What sorts of improvements would you be willing to spend more of your own money on, in taxes or fees, and why?

Feedback summary

Manage Congestion - Across the various priorities, the majority of conversations viewed this aspect as the most valuable.

- Diverting trucks off I-35 was a way many proposed how to manage congestion on the highways. HOV and toll lanes were also discussed.
- Getting cars off the road through public transportation and carpooling/ride sharing systems was consistently addressed.
  - Several discussed a rail system, although the opinion on the value of rail varied significantly from conversation to conversation.
  - Most notably, investing in better bus service was discussed in nearly every conversation

Improve Connections in my Neighborhood - Participants in most conversations believed that this priority category was not only important but also aids in supporting other priorities, primarily congestion.
• Again, we saw a focus on public transportation. Many across Austin shared their view that if it was possible to get access to the location they wanted via public transit they would use that option, yet because the public transit in their region does not provide them with that option, they drive.
• Sidewalks and cycling accessibility were also mentioned across many conversations.

**Improve Safety** - Although to a lesser degree, many of the conversation participants touched on the subject of improving safety. We saw more prevalence of this priority in Districts 1 and 2. The following safety issues were addressed:

• Stops signs, lights and turn signals
• Bike lanes
• Sidewalks and crosswalks
• Traffic violation enforcement
• Education and awareness

**Improve the Quality of My Streets** - While addressed a few times, this priority was discussed far less than any of the others.

**Other notable themes that you’ll see throughout the full feedback report include:**

• Interconnectedness of priorities
• Transparency in how money is used
• Shift of mobility discussion away from cars and roads and toward public transportation, land use and data driven decisions

**How feedback is being used**

Feedback will be presented to the Austin City Council’s Mobility Committee on June 8, 2016. The meeting will take place at 3 p.m. in the Council Chambers at City Hall. Following this presentation, City Council may consider potential funding options for those needs.

Additionally, this input will feed into the upcoming Austin Strategic Mobility Plan (ASMP) update. The ASMP update will involve extensive communication engagement and will guide transportation development and investment for the next 10+ years.

**Who will be reviewing the feedback?** (names and project roles included)

• Austin City Council
• Capital Planning Office
  o Susan Daniels – Capital Program Manager
  o Ashley Parsons – Data Analyst
• Austin Transportation Department
  o Annick Beaudet – Manager, System Development Division
  o Liane Miller – Planner
  o Cole Kitten – Transportation Planner
• Public Works Department
  o Annie Van Zant – Capital Improvement Program Asset Manager
  o Karen Villatoro – Data Analyst
Effective Engagement Combines Innovation with Public Outreach

By pairing the personal with the technical, South Bend, Ind., got the most from its citizen engagement efforts.

by Stephen Goldsmith / December 2017

The city of South Bend, Ind., tackled urban blight in short order, rehabilitating or demolishing 1,000 abandoned properties two months ahead of the 1,000-day goal set by Mayor Pete Buttigieg. However, resolving the blight issue created a new problem: What to do with hundreds of now-vacant lots scattered throughout the city? To answer this question, South Bend paired the power of public outreach with innovative technology.

The city sent municipal employees and University of Notre Dame students into the field to understand what features community members wanted to see in their neighborhoods. “We had people working with neighborhood groups, creating makeshift policy labs through which we could understand issues from residents’ perspectives,” explained Santiago Garces, South Bend’s chief innovation officer. To ensure the process would garner effective and representative public input, the city relied on its relationship with the university to construct methodologies and survey instruments.

To make sense of the data gathered, South Bend then paired this tried-and-true method of public outreach with cutting-edge mapping technology. The city used ArcGIS Hub, an Esri platform that clusters data sets and tools around specific citywide initiatives, in order to improve public input. Anthony Puzzo of Esri described the hub as “a two-way engagement platform to help connect the government to its citizens and create a digital conversation about the initiative at hand.”

The first element of this platform is a visualization of resident input that takes information gathered on the ground and maps it lot by lot across the city. For example, the map might show that residents see one lot as an ideal place for affordable housing and another as a good spot for green infrastructure. The other element is a channel of
communication that allows residents to comment on the information displayed in the map. “We are using the hub to create a modern way of organizing open data, presenting the information in a consumable fashion, and creating a digital conversation to listen to those interested,” explained Puzzo. With respect to blight, the hub provides “a way of understanding which lots are right for which uses,” said Garces. And opening the platform to the public has allowed the city to publicize its successes and gain buy-in for construction and renovation projects.

For Garces, however, it was important that the technology came after the city put in the work to engage with residents in their neighborhoods. The relationships the city developed with community members were invaluable in gaining support for projects. “With this on-the-ground engagement, we were able to develop the trust to experiment with new things — for example, a tree nursery that we’re thinking about filling with edible fruit that could serve food deserts,” Garces explained.

Moreover, engaging with residents on the ground increased community interest in city projects. “With technology only, you may get participation, but you don’t necessarily get buy-in because people feel like they have a marginal influence,” Garces said. “It feels to residents more like rooting for their favorite American Idol contestant than participating in a conversation.” On the other hand, talking to residents face-to-face assures them that their voices will be heard, and then technology can be a useful tool for organizing and delivering upon this public input.

And the combination of personal outreach and technology ensured that the city’s efforts engaged a representative group of voices. “Especially in South Bend, neighborhoods that don’t have a ton of money don’t have access to tech platforms,” said Garces. And yet, following on-the-ground engagement with technology also aided efforts toward inclusivity. According to Garces, during the outreach process, students and employees analyzed the distribution of participation across the city and, seeing that the channels of communication were underused in low-income areas, adjusted their methods in order to broaden the reach. Puzzo described the hub platform as “a way of capturing who from the public is providing information. You know who you’re engaging with and can manage your community accordingly.”

South Bend’s approach to its blight outreach efforts — fusing the personal with the technical — is exactly how cities should approach tech-driven initiatives. Technology is no replacement for human-centered policy. Rather, “technology validates a process that’s a lot more democratic and meaningful,” Garces said.