

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WORKBOOK

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT** is the process of working collaboratively with community groups to address issues that impact the well-being of those groups. It seeks to better engage the community to achieve longterm and sustainable outcomes, processes, relationships, discourse, decision-making, and/or implementation.

— Penn State Center for Economic and Community Development and Financial Times Lexicon

At the core of the Main Street approach to revitalization is the vision of creating places of shared prosperity, equal access to opportunity, and inclusive engagement. Informing residents about downtown activity and seeking to understand their perspective taps into the collective intelligence of the community and ensures transparency in the decisions and actions of a Main Street program.

This workbook — drafted by University of Colorado Denver Master's in Urban Planning students and refined by Colorado Main Street — serves as a touch point for inspiration and direction in engaging your community. The exercises focus on the importance of doing engagement, the good it can do done well, and the harm it can do if done poorly (or not done at all).

## WE HOPE TO HELP YOU CONSIDER THE QUESTIONS ...

**WHAT** are the foundations of community engagement?


**WHY** is engagement important?


**WHEN** to engage?

**WHO** should be included?


**HOW** to engage?


## THIS WORKBOOK SHOULD ALLOW YOU TO...

 Review the best practices in engagement

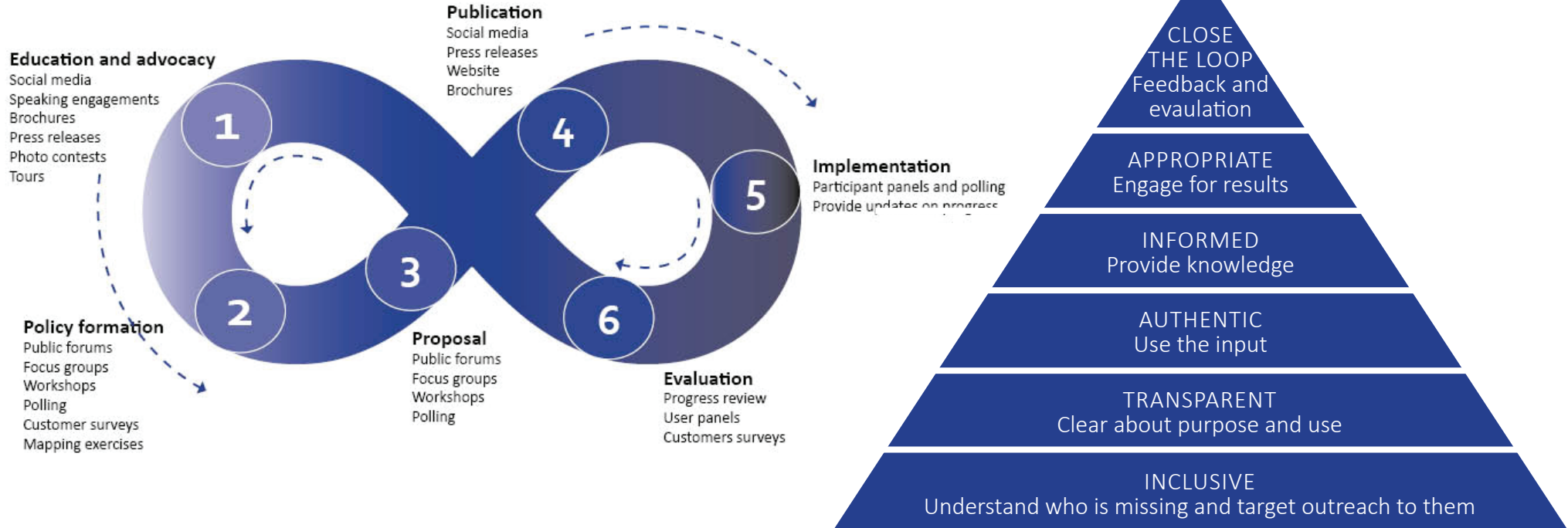
 Define new goals

 Identify projects and times for input

 Discover new audiences

 Explore new strategies for engagement

# WHAT are the best practices in engagement



## REFLECTION

HOW CAN YOU USE EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY AS PART OF YOUR ENGAGEMENT PLAN?

DESCRIBE YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR GOOD PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

# WHY ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY

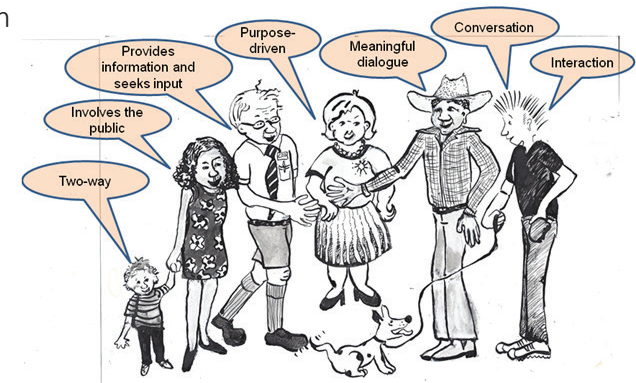
**THOUGHTFUL ENGAGEMENT** avoids the pitfall of distrust; encourages engagement in future initiatives; and upholds the credibility of leaders. The first step in thoughtful engagement is keeping residents informed — long before, throughout, and after more active engagement is requested (think of the infinity chart on the preceeding page).

**LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT** range from providing information (INFORM) to receiving feedback on that information (CONSULT), up to bringing in the public at the earliest stages (INVOLVE) to creating smaller groups that become part of the decision makers and possibly implementers (COLLABORATE) to turning the decision over to the public (EMPOWER). Different levels of engagement could be used with varying levels stakeholders — downtown business owners may have a higher stake in Main Street infrastructure than residents, who in turn have a higher stake than visitors to the community, but all may have ideas to share.

**PARTICIPATORY ENGAGEMENT** can foster sense of community; identify the community's values, ideas, and recommendations; increase community buy-in and support; make lasting changes that don't need to be revisited; build trust; and provide a sense of ownership and investment in the community.

**DIVERSE ENGAGEMENT** provides more perspectives and thus more thorough information; creates a welcoming environment; and helps retain residents and talent.

**AUTHENTIC ENGAGEMENT** selects the level of engagement that will be reflected in the final outcome of a process or project.



## REFLECTION

WHY IS ENGAGEMENT IMPORTANT TO MY COMMUNITY?

WHAT DOES SUCCESSFUL ENGAGEMENT LOOK LIKE?

HOW WILL COMMUNITY INPUT BE MEANINGFULLY INCORPORATED INTO DECISIONS?

WHAT HARM WOULD POORLY EXECUTED ENGAGEMENT HAVE ON THE PROJECT OR THE COMMUNITY?

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY?

# WHEN IS ENGAGEMENT NEEDED

## HOW TO BUILD A LIGHTHOUSE

*PICK A PURPOSE. Think of the topic as the car and the purpose as the fuel. While deciding on a topic got us on the road, establishing a purpose for the event's dialogue moved us down the road. Every aspect, from the selection of the panelists to the questions on the agenda, was birthed from the purpose of the event.*

*DON'T DO IT ALONE. Who would be great at getting the word out? At engaging community leaders to be potential attendees or panelists? At leading a potentially challenging conversation? A team can make the event the best it can be.*

*CENTER THE COMMUNITY Small business owners, educators, artists, and social justice leaders can fill in the gaps during the dialogue and provide first-hand experience of community needs.*

— Kelly Forkenbrock for the Biggest Little Library Conference

As the page exploring best practices indicates, community engagement is a continuous cycle — even without a current project or plan where consultation or collaboration with residents is desired, education and advocacy lays the groundwork for an informed (and sympathetic) community when the need arises.

With enough time and an open mind, you can empower residents to determine the course of a project and work with them on its implementation. Consensus can be reached through facilitated small group consultation. A broader group can be reached through a process that involves residents on meaningful aspects of a project. Consulting also reaches a wider range of the public, but on a smaller impact to the project. And, of course, keeping people informed at whatever level of input you seek is necessary for transparent action.

## REFLECTION

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF THE PROJECT?

HOW MUCH DOES THE COMMUNITY KNOW ABOUT THE PROJECT AND ITS IMPACT?

WHAT DECISIONS HAVE ALREADY BEEN MADE?

WHAT DECISIONS COULD THE COMMUNITY INFORM?

HOW WILL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FIT INTO THE PROJECT TIMELINE?

IS THERE THE CAPACITY TO PERFORM GOOD PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT?

# WHO TO ENGAGE

## PRIMARY ROLES

- Organizers identify and gather stakeholders, prepare them on issues, discuss ways to participate, and decide logistical considerations: Who meets? Who facilitates? Who generates and assesses ideas? Whose input is advisory and whose binding?
- Sponsors/Conveners invite participation and host gatherings.
- Contributors/Stakeholders provide input such as ideas, vision, questions and concerns, priorities and goals, solutions.
- Deciders make authoritative decisions using contributors' input.

## SUPPORTING ROLES

- Facilitators help manage the conversation, promote learning, fill information gaps, uncover assumptions, generate consensus, etc.
- Analysts provide important information, and research; collect and analyze data, do community surveys, research codes and ordinances, and present results.

## YOUR COMMUNITY

- Inclusive public engagement means know who makes up your community. The State Demography Office is a great resource for this - Visit [demography.dola.colorado.gov](http://demography.dola.colorado.gov).

### GIVE YOUNG PEOPLE A VOICE AND GOOD THINGS HAPPEN

*With a large population of seniors ... we felt that our youth voice just wasn't always heard," says Teal VanLanen of Live Algoma.*

*Addressing that, Mayor Wayne Schmidt appointed high school students to serve on committees for Community Development and Parks and Recreation.*

*"I want people to have new ideas. Well, where do you get new ideas from? You get new ideas from your youth," Schmidt says.*

*Schools, too, are encouraging students to lead projects on a range of issues, from cleaning up Algoma's beach to saving "ugly fruit" from supermarkets to serve as healthy snacks in school cafeterias.*

— 2017 RWJF Culture of Health Prize Winner: Algoma, Wisc.

## REFLECTION

WHO WILL THE PROJECT IMPACT?

WHO ARE GOOD ALLIES?

WHO ARE THE DETRACTORS? WHAT MIGHT MAKE THEM ALLIES OR NEUTRAL?

WHO AREN'T YOU HEARING FROM?

WHAT BARRIERS MIGHT DIFFERENT GROUPS FACE DURING THE PROJECT?

# HOW TO ENGAGE YOUR COMMUNITY FOR RESULTS

**TACTICS AND TECHNIQUES** will vary depending on the reasons you are engaging (from providing information or seeking ideas), who you are engaging (from youth to retirees), and what the project is (from a comprehensive plan to park design).

**ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES** should seek to be dynamic, adaptive, and responsive to resident needs and circumstances. **For pros/cons**, consider transportation, language, technological, and physical barriers that limit access to information and active engagement for socioeconomically disadvantaged populations, community members with disabilities, youth, parents, the elderly, and communities of color, as well as costs and logistical considerations.

## REFLECTION

Pros/cons for your community/project

Type of engagement	Description
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FOCUS GROUPS	Small groups share knowledge and ideas
CHARRETTES	Participants map project features
OPEN HOUSES	Different stations for input

WALK SHOPS	Walk the project/neighborhood in a group (or individually with instruction)
PHOTO VOICE	Use of photography to communicate environment and experiences
STREET STALLS	Installation in public space providing opportunity for comment

TACITCAL URBANISM	Or “pop-up design”; short term demonstration of long-term vision
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CANVASSING	Door-to-door discussions
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SURVEYS	Print or digital
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ONLINE	Social media, website, and email using tools such as videos, photos, maps
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