

***COMPENDIUM 1:
BUILDING LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAPACITY
FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT***

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This compendium to our [summary report](#) reviews the comparative literature on community engagement and offers concepts for analyzing capacity building by local governments.

CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW

Local governments across the United States and around the world are moving away from a traditional top-down approach of public administration to greater partnership and collaboration between local governments and their communities. Effective community engagement is essential to this shift. This more collaborative approach to governance goes by many names: Participatory Democracy, Deliberative Democracy, Collaborative Governance, Local Democracy, Shared Governance, and others.

This section discusses concepts that help to frame this work, proposes a spectrum of local government approaches to community engagement, and describes elements that local governments could include as part of a robust community engagement strategy and program.

TRADITIONAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION VS. SHARED GOVERNANCE

Public administration in the United States has a long tradition of seeing a limited role for the public in policy development and the day-to-day operations of government (Cooper 2011). This tradition is rooted in the Progressive Reform movement of the early 20th Century that sought to ground public administration in “norms of professionalism, efficiency, scientific management, and administrative management.” The movement led to the creation of “barriers against the influence of the citizenry on the day-to-day administration of government (pp. 239-240).”

This traditional form of public administration is marked by a top-down, expert driven approach that has been characterized as a “parent-child” relationship between government leaders, staff, and the community (Leighninger 2006).

Leighninger maintains that elected officials and administrators today are finding it more difficult to govern.¹ Many community members are alienated from government as a focus of collective action, they trust government less than in the past, and they are less willing to pay to support government services.

Leighninger also asserts that problems facing communities are more complex than in the past, and local government leaders find themselves needing to leverage community resources to solve these problems because “government can’t do it on its own.”² He suggests that many community members are increasingly looking for an “adult-adult” partnership with government, in which both the government and the community work together to solve the community’s problems.³

¹ Matt Leighninger, *The Next Form of Democracy: How Expert Rule is Giving Way to Shared Governance—and Why Politics Will Never Be the Same* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006).

² Leighninger, p. 1.

³ Leighninger, p. 2.

Many local government leaders and staff see value in shifting to a new model of shared governance. They believe that this model depends on the willingness and skills of local government leaders and staff to engage and partner with their diverse communities.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND EQUITY

Community engagement and equity are complementary and overlapping concepts, although each has a particular focus and scope of action.

- **Community Engagement:** Effective community engagement is grounded in the principle that people in the community should have a voice in decisions that affect them. Good community engagement processes identify differently affected communities within the larger community and use a variety of culturally appropriate tools, techniques, and programs to ensure that the voices of members of these communities are heard in local decision-making processes.
- **Equity:** In the context of this report, equity refers to efforts to overcome disparities in the processes and outcomes of local government decision making. Equity means that governments should acknowledge and actively address historical and current disparities—in organizational culture, hiring and contracting, and in their approach to community engagement for visioning, strategies, planning, policies, programs, and projects. We treat equity as a broader concept that encompasses and informs the practices of public participation and community engagement.

Portland’s “A Framework for Equity: Making Equity Real” defines equity as follows:

Equity is when everyone has access to the opportunities necessary to satisfy their essential needs, advance their well-being and achieve their full potential. We have a shared fate as individuals within a community and communities within a society. All communities need the ability to shape their own present and future. Equity is both a means to healthy communities and an end that benefits us all.⁴

The Framework asserts that the promise of equity and opportunity is real when:

- All Portlanders have access to a high-quality education, living wage jobs, safe neighborhoods, basic services, a healthy natural environment, efficient public transit, parks and greenspaces, decent housing, and healthy food.
- The benefits of growth and change are equitably shared across our communities. No one community is overly burdened by the region’s growth.
- All Portlanders and communities fully participate in and influence public decision-making.
- Portland is a place where your future is not limited by your race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, income, where you were born or where you live.
- Underrepresented communities are engaged partners in policy decisions.⁵

The Local and Regional Government Alliance on Race & Equity (GARE) publication “Racial Equity: Getting to Results” states that “racial inequities exist across every indicator for success—including health,

⁴ “A Framework for Equity: Making Equity Real” (Portland: City of Portland, 2012), 1.

⁵ City of Portland, 1.

criminal justice, education, jobs, housing, and beyond.”⁶ GARE asserts that “government has a key role in advancing racial equity.”¹³ GARE seeks to model “at the local level how it is truly possible for government to advance racial equity and to develop into an inclusive and effective democracy”.¹⁴ GARE offers local governments many useful guides and tools for how to advance equity.

GARE’s “[Six-Part Strategic Approach to Institutional Change](#)” encourages local governments to Normalize, Organize, and Operationalize:

- Use a racial equity framework.
- Build organizational capacity.
- Implement racial equity tools.
- Be data-driven.
- Partner with other institutions and communities.
- Operate with urgency and accountability.

It is important for government officials not to assume that equitable outcomes will be a natural byproduct of all community engagement. When designed, planned, and executed with the intention to ensure equity, community engagement is an essential way to promote equitable outcomes in any context for government. However, without this intention and a grounding in the concepts addressed above, community engagement efforts run the risk of reinforcing oppressive structures and systems, undermining equity work in the process.

TARGETED UNIVERSALISM

“Targeted Universalism” is a framework to help local governments integrate community engagement and equity into their work. Wendy Willis, in her 2020 article, states that for those “interested in broad, deep, and authentic community engagement, targeted universalism provides a promising framework that takes its eyes off the majority culture as the benchmark in favor of a goal set to serve everyone.”⁷

Willis describes targeted universalism as “setting universal goals pursued by targeted processes to achieve those goals. Within a targeted universalism framework, universal goals are established for all groups concerned. The strategies developed to achieve those goals are targeted, based on how different groups are situated within structures, culture, and across geographies to obtain the universal goal.”⁸

Willis identifies the five steps to “designing and implementing a targeted universalist policy or project” as the following:

1. Establish a universal goal.
2. Assess general population performance relative to the goal.
3. Identify groups and places that are performing differently with respect to the goal and disaggregate them.

⁶ Erika Bernabei, “Racial Equity: Getting to Results” (Local and Regional Government Alliance on Racial Equity, 2017), 4. https://www.racialequityalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/GARE_GettingtoEquity_July2017_PUBLISH.pdf 13 Bernabei, 4. 14 Bernabei, 4.

⁷ Wendy Willis, “Take a Seat at Oregon’s Kitchen Table: Adapting Targeted Universalism for Broad and Deep Civic Engagement,” *National Civic Review* 108, no. 4 (2020). <https://www.nationalcivicleague.org/ncr-article/take-a-seat-at-oregons-kitchen-tableadapting-targeted-universalism-for-broad-and-deep-civic-engagement/>

⁸ Willis, “Take a Seat Oregon’s Kitchen Table.”

4. Assess and understand the structures that support or impede each group from achieving the universal goal.
5. Develop and implement targeted strategies for each group.⁹

Willis describes how Oregon’s Kitchen Table applies targeted universalism to civic engagement. When elected officials or public managers invite Oregon’s Kitchen Table to “partner with them in engaging community members around a particular decision or cluster of decisions,” Oregon’s Kitchen Table does the following:

- Determine the type of input that would be meaningful for the decision at hand.
- Set an engagement goal for the entire community, either in percentage terms or in raw numbers.
- Use census and other demographic data to determine who is living in the community.
- Set numeric participation goals for each demographic subgroup in the community.
- Conduct an assessment to determine how specific subgroups have or have not participated in the past and identify specific barriers to participation for these groups.
- Identify organizers and other connectors in the targeted communities—primarily local organizers who have deep relationships and who work in the community, sometimes in formal roles, often in less formal ones.¹⁰

SPECTRUM OF APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement efforts vary significantly in their scope and effectiveness across different communities. This variation reflects the many ways that local government leaders and staff view the role of government and the extent to which they value engaging community members in local decision making. It also reflects the level of resources that local governments devote to community engagement. These different approaches also reflect the extent to which local governments adopt the traditional “parent-child” relationship as compared to the shared governance “adult-adult” partnership approach.

We offer a four-step spectrum to illustrate general levels of local government approaches to community engagement. Local governments may find it helpful to think about where they are on this spectrum and where they would like to be. The categories are broad and intended to inspire further conversations.

1. DOING THE MINIMUM REQUIRED

A local government limits its community engagement efforts to complying with statutory and legal requirements to notify and engage the public. This level is characterized by the government holding public meetings, providing formal notice to homeowners and a limited number of stakeholders, and allowing minimum public comment (often described as “two minutes at the microphone”). Many community members find this approach unsatisfying because it limits their ability to provide meaningful input on decisions.

⁹ Willis, “Take a Seat at Oregon’s Kitchen Table.”

¹⁰ Willis, “Take a Seat at Oregon’s Kitchen Table.”

2. TRADITIONAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

Most local governments use traditional community engagement tools to reach and engage the public beyond the legally required minimum. Examples include wider public announcements, additional public meetings, open houses, town halls, boards and commissions, and advisory committees.

Traditional community engagement tools tend to focus more on informing the public about government actions rather than engaging the community in shaping local decision making. Processes are typically one-size-fits-all with little effort to tailor their efforts to reach groups within the community who may be hard to reach. Processes are designed primarily to serve the government's need to complete a plan or deliver a project. This kind of engagement is often described as "box checking," with many community members feeling that the government is "going through the motions" to fulfill a formal obligation with little attention to meaningful input in decision making.

3. BEST PRACTICES FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Local governments that use community engagement best practices seek to identify who is affected by a potential policy, program, or project and use strategies to reach and engage different groups in the community. Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, communications are tailored to different groups and provide the information community members need to participate. Community members often understand the process, feel heard, and may feel they have an impact. At this level, local governments design their community engagement strategies to serve the needs of both government and the community.

This approach is commendable (and can even be exemplary), but its effectiveness is limited if applied episodically. At this level, a local government may apply well-designed engagement processes to particular projects or programs, but it does not use these practices consistently across all policies, programs, and projects. The quality of community engagement often depends on the leadership of individual elected officials, department heads, or staff who understand and value good community engagement.

The limitation of this approach is that it is not fully institutionalized or sustainable through changes in leadership. Best practices and information about how to engage the community are not necessarily shared across departments. Efforts to engage different ethnic and cultural groups often end with the completion of an individual project without developing long-term relationships. No overarching goals or standards guide and institutionalize community engagement practices. When key elected leaders, administrators, or staff move on, the use of best practices may diminish.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM AND CULTURE

The highest level of community engagement occurs when a local government has created and embedded a culture of effective community engagement throughout the organization. The local government uses appropriate best practices in developing all its policies, programs, projects, and decision-making processes.

At this level, elected officials adopt formal principles, goals, and standards that define effective community engagement and ensure they are followed. Elected officials, administrators, staff, and the community share an understanding of what good engagement looks like and their roles in achieving it.

Local governments develop a clear understanding of the demographics of the community and the different types of groups within their community. Local government leaders and staff also identify the community leaders and organizations within these groups that can help the government develop culturally appropriate strategies and tools to engage and partner with the full diversity of the community.

Elected officials support government staff in developing long-term relationships with community organizations to build trust, understanding, and partnerships.

Community engagement skills and experience are factored into the recruitment, hiring, and evaluation of employees responsible for community engagement across departments. Best practices are identified and the organization invests in the training and tools necessary to support their staff and build their skills. Peer networking opportunities allow staff to share lessons learned about different groups in the community and practices that work. Skilled community engagement consultants sometimes are used to augment staff capacity when needed.

Local government leaders and staff connect and collaborate with other jurisdictions, organizations, and institutions that serve the same community, sharing knowledge and coordinating their community engagement strategies and activities.

The table on the next page summarizes the spectrum described here.

SPECTRUM OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CAPACITY

Local government capacity to engage the community can vary significantly. The spectrum below illustrates different approaches to community engagement. Local governments may find it helpful to think about where they are on this spectrum and where they would like to be. The categories are broad and intended to inspire further conversation.

1	<p>DOING THE MINIMUM REQUIRED</p> <p>Local government limits its community engagement efforts to complying with statutory and legal requirements to notify and engage the public.</p>	<p>Local government holds public meetings, provides formal notice to homeowners and a limited number of stakeholders, and allows minimum public comment (often described as “two minutes at the microphone”). Many community members find this approach unsatisfying because it limits their ability to provide meaningful input on decisions.</p>
2	<p>TRADITIONAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOLS</p> <p>Local government uses traditional community engagement tools to reach and engage the public beyond the legally required minimum. Examples include wider public announcements, additional public meetings, open houses, town halls, boards and commissions, and advisory committees.</p>	<p>Traditional community engagement tools tend to focus on informing the public about government actions rather than engaging the community in decision making. Processes typically are one-size-fits-all with little effort to tailor their efforts to reach diverse groups in the community. Processes are designed primarily to serve the government’s need to complete a plan or deliver a project. Community members may feel that the government is “going through the motions” to fulfill a formal obligation rather than seeking meaningful community input.</p>
3	<p>SOME USE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT BEST PRACTICES</p> <p>Local government uses community engagement best practices for certain projects, policies, or programs to identify and engage the broader diversity of people and groups affected, and to provide meaningful opportunities for the public to shape final outcomes.</p>	<p>Communications and outreach are tailored to different groups and provide the information community members need to participate. Community members often understand the process, feel heard, and may feel they have an impact. Well-designed engagement processes are used on a case-by-case basis, but not across all the jurisdiction’s projects, policies, and programs. The quality of each engagement effort depends on the leadership of individual elected officials, department heads, or staff who understand and value good community engagement.</p>
4	<p>FULLY EMBEDDED AND JURISDICTION-WIDE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CULTURE</p> <p>Local government has created and embedded a culture of effective community engagement throughout the organization. Local government uses appropriate community engagement best practices in developing all its policies, programs, projects, and decision-making processes.</p>	<p>Elected officials adopt formal principles, goals, and standards that define effective community engagement and ensure they are followed consistently. Community engagement skills and experience are factored into the recruitment, hiring, and evaluation of employees responsible for community engagement across departments. Best practices are identified, and the organization invests in the training and tools necessary to support their staff and build their skills. Elected officials support government staff in developing long-term relationships with community organizations to build trust, understanding, and partnerships.</p>

ELEMENTS OF A ROBUST COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM

This section describes some of the specific policies, strategies, and tools that support a strong local government community engagement program and culture.

We recognize that smaller communities will have fewer resources and likely less capacity than larger ones to implement the full range of these elements. Organizations and institutions that support local governments in Oregon could enhance the capacity of smaller communities to implement more of these approaches and practices.

This is not a theoretical exercise. While all these elements may not exist in any single jurisdiction, each of them has been implemented by one or more local governments in Oregon.

These practices/approaches are grouped into:

- Policies and Standards
- Equity
- Building Government Capacity
- Building Community Capacity
- Intergovernmental Coordination and Collaboration
- Innovative Tools and Processes
- Accountability

POLICIES AND STANDARDS

Elected officials can adopt policies that set expectations and guide community engagement throughout the local government. This can help embed effective community engagement practices in the local government structures and culture. Examples include:

- **Community Engagement Principles and Standards:** Define and set standards for effective community engagement.
- **Strategic Plan to Increase Community Engagement:** Establish a vision for success over time, supported by goals, strategies, and recommendations.
- **Formal Assessment Tool:** Use a formal assessment tool to guide leaders and staff in determining when to engage the community and at what level.
- **Department-specific community engagement plans:** Tailor approaches to the kind of work each department does and the community members who are affected by the department's work. These plans should include an assessment of the department's current capacity to engage the community and identification of the resources needed to expand this capacity.
- **Comprehensive Plan Program for Land Use Planning:** Update the local jurisdiction's State-mandated chapter to comply with [Oregon's Statewide Planning Goal 1](#) to reflect current principles and best practices.
- **Local Government Charter/Guiding Documents:** Update these to formalize a general role of the community in government decision making.

EQUITY

Equitable engagement requires that all community members impacted by government decisions be informed and given an opportunity to participate in decision making processes, including those who would never otherwise hear about the public process, are reluctant to participate, have been passively ignored, or have been actively excluded. As a practical matter, this means that governments must work with great intention to include those who are harder to reach than others who typically participate or can easily access information.

From the standpoint of community engagement, an equity lens affects the practices of communication (What is your message and how do you convey it?), outreach (Who is your audience and how do you reach them?), and decision making (How do you gather public input and report back on how it affected the decision?).

Equity also requires making a conscientious and purposeful effort to establish a baseline for improvement through clear policies, plans, and guidance:

- Gather information to identify disparities in outcomes across different groups in the community.
- Develop an Equity Strategy and Plan that identifies clear goals, objectives and measurable outcomes.
- Use an equity lens to guide policies and programs for engaging affected communities in decision making.
- Build equitable outcomes into the evaluation of community engagement plans.

BUILDING GOVERNMENT CAPACITY

Local governments need to have the internal capacity to design and implement effective community engagement activities.

- **Adequate Staffing/Job Descriptions**
 - Hire one or more staff with strong community engagement skills and experience who can advise and consult with elected leaders and departments on how to do high quality community engagement.
 - Create job descriptions and performance reviews for administrators and department heads that include knowledge of community engagement principles and best practices and experience engaging successfully with the community.
- **Who's in the Community?**
 - Review community demographics and self-identification of members.
 - Map civic capacity and leadership to build relationships and identify potential partners.
- **Best Practices Guides/Toolkits**
 - General community engagement guide/handbook.
 - How to develop an engagement plan for specific projects.
 - Effective outreach and communication.
 - Process design and techniques.

- Meeting facilitation.
- How to work effectively with community engagement consultants.
- Accessibility (e.g., ADA compliance, language interpretation/translation).
- Advisory committees—creation, recruitment, and Support.
- Outreach strategies for specific communities
- Digital engagement.
- Survey design.
- Effective town halls, listening sessions, focus groups.
- Metrics and evaluation.
- **Training for Staff and Leaders**
 - Community engagement 101 (key principles and best practices).
 - Community engagement program development.
 - Design of community engagement strategies and plans.
 - Skill-building workshops.
 - Onboarding for newly elected leaders on values, policies, and practices.
- **Peer Networking and Support**
 - Convene regular formal and informal gatherings of and communication between community engagement staff within and across jurisdictions to share information about the community and engagement practices.
 - Use peer networking forums and opportunities through professional organizations (e.g. ELGL, ICMA, OCCMA, etc.) to discuss community engagement tools and practices.
- **Communications and Social Media**
 - Develop an overall strategy to guide and support effective communication with the full diversity of the community by government leaders and staff.
 - Perform regular outreach to the community to let people know what local government is doing, other community events, and opportunities to engage—considering print, radio, and other media in order to bridge the digital divide.
 - Maintain a government website that is designed to be accessible to the full diversity of community members and that provides relevant and useful information for community members.
 - Use social media tools and strategies to extend outreach;
 - Consider online suites of tools for communication and community input.
- **Formal Notification System**

Ensure that required formal notifications of proposed actions and decisions reach all types of affected community members (not just property owners) and include information that is clear, relevant, and useful to community members.
- **Boards, Commissions, Advisory Committees**

Develop best practices for forming and supporting these committees, including effective recruitment of diverse members, onboarding and ongoing support that gives members the

information they need to be effective and feel their time is well spent, clear communication to the community, and coordination between staff supporting different committees.

- **Major Planning Projects**

Use best practices in the design and implementation of important planning and policy development processes:

- Community visioning.
- Strategic planning.
- Comprehensive Plan updates.
- Community revitalization plans.
- Capital projects.
- Major policy development.

- **Community Surveys**

Execute well-designed and implemented surveys to identify community priorities and needs—either one time or recurring.

BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY

Strengthening the capacity of community members to participate in government processes enhances the government’s ability to deliver information and engage the public in decision making processes.

- **Volunteer Coordination, Support, Recognition**

- Offer opportunities for local government and community events, projects, committees, etc.
- Hire and train support staff to help coordinate the volunteer system.
- Award annual recognition to celebrate volunteers (chosen by government leaders or community members).

- **Community Leadership Training**

- Encourage the community to learn how government works.
- Support the community to learn how to organize and advocate for community issues and projects.

- **Partnership with Community and Neighborhood Organizations**

- Formally recognize neighborhood and other community-based groups as local government partners.
- Support staff and leaders to build long-term relationships with neighborhood and community partner organizations to support future collaboration.

- **Community Small Grants**

Make funds available to a broad diversity of community and neighborhood groups to support community events and engagement activities and projects.

- **Fun Community Events**
 - Support community building with events that bring people together and help them see and connect with other community members.
 - Examples include: community parades, picnics, art fairs, farmers markets, cultural festivals, scavenger hunts, and other community gatherings.
 - Provide budget and staffing for planning, insurance, space, equipment, volunteer coordination, publicity, etc.
- **Convening the Community**
 - Host community/neighborhood summits that bring together different community organizations to talk to each other and local government.
 - Enable neighborhood and other community visioning processes to establish goals and strategies for subsets of the larger community.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

Work with other local governments to expand knowledge and leverage resources.

- **Participate in regular meetings and coordination with other jurisdictions, institutions, and organizations:** overlapping boundaries that serve the same community (e.g. city, county, school districts, special districts, libraries, police, park systems, health systems, community service organizations, etc.) can provide opportunities for collaboration.
- **Take advantage of regular peer sharing opportunities:** community staff from different entities can share or co-create solutions to community issues.
- **Seek out good ideas from other jurisdictions and communities:** Identify useful examples of community engagement successes and failures from other jurisdictions and communities.

INNOVATIVE ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

- **Deliberative processes and community dialogues:** convene the public to talk about important community issues.
- **Collaborative processes that convene stakeholders:** work through conflicts and find a path forward on challenging issues.
- **Participatory Budgeting processes:** allow community members to determine the use of a specific pot of funds or have some influence during the regular budgeting process.
- **Resident or Community Juries:** convene the community to make decisions on a particular question or questions posed by elected leaders.
- **Appreciative Inquiry/Appreciative Organizing:** work with leaders and the community to identify specific local government and community goals and strategies to achieve them.

ACCOUNTABILITY

- **Evaluation:** develop consistent evaluation tools and track and regularly evaluate community engagement activities.

- **Annual “State of Community Engagement” report:** reaffirm community engagement principles and goals, reports on progress, and identifies additional work to be done.
- **Ongoing Community Engagement Advisory Committee/Council:** advises local government on how to improve the quality and consistency of community engagement. Example: the City of Portland’s [Public Involvement Advisory Council \(PIAC\)](#) is a model that includes both community members and government staff on the committee.
- **Public records request policies and system:** develop a process that is accessible and easy to use for the community.
- **Process to raise concerns about community engagement activities** (e.g., Ombudsman or Auditor).

EXEMPLARY PRACTICES AROUND THE WORLD

Other countries offer intriguing examples of how national governments can encourage good community engagement at the local level. They suggest what an Oregon statewide community engagement policy might look like.

AUSTRALIA: BEST PRACTICE CONSULTATION

Many British Commonwealth countries require some level of “public consultation” in government decision making. At a minimum this can look very much like the basic public meetings requirements in the United States, but some countries have certainly raised the bar on what good community engagement can look like.

One example is the Australian government’s guidance on [“Best Practice Consultation”](#) for the development of policies and regulations. The Guidance Note provides detailed guidance on how government agencies should engage stakeholders in genuine consultation processes to consider the “real-world impact” of policy options.¹¹

SCOTLAND: NATIONAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

Scotland has a comprehensive national community engagement policy and related programs to support local government decision-making.

Some of the elements of this [“Community Empowerment” policy](#) include:

- Funding for projects that empower local communities, build community capacity, and promote more responsive, inclusive, community-led, and place-based approaches to meeting local needs.
- Funding for Participatory Budgeting projects.
- Support for Scotland’s 1,200 “community councils,” which are run by residents to benefit their communities.
- A formal “participation request” process that allows community members to request to participate in decisions and processes that affect them.
- National Standards for Community Engagement that establish best practices for public bodies to engage the community.
- Local Governance Review to examine “how local decisions are made and how local democracy is working.”
- Supporting “community planning” processes to improve the way public service providers develop and deliver services.

[Scotland’s National Community Engagement Standards](#) establish “clear principles that describe the main elements of effective community engagement.” The Standards are intended for:

¹¹ “Guidance Note: Best Practice Consultation,” (Australian Government, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2016).
<https://pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/best-practice-consultation.pdf>

- **Public sector bodies and elected representatives** “to help them plan how to involve communities in shaping local plans and services, identify who should be involved, and make sure that the community engagement process is fair and effective.”
- **Third sector organizations and community groups** to help them involve their members or the wider community in shaping the services they deliver, and to make sure that they accurately represent members’ or communities’ views in other decision-making processes.”
- **The private and independent sector** “to help agencies and businesses involve and work with the community in planning developments and designing services.”

The Scottish approach is based on [7 Standards for Community Engagement](#).



APPENDIX 1

LITERATURE REVIEW & THEORY OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

DEFINITIONS

To understand how local governments can increase their capacity for community engagement, we sought a coherent framework to describe what community engagement is and how it is carried out in practice. This allowed us to define the field of practice with more precision, and to establish a deductive framework by which to analyze case studies, training regimes, and other engagement-based systems.

We began by seeking and identifying a definition of community engagement for the purposes of our project. The term has been used widely to describe efforts ranging from public relations where the intent is to inform and sometimes persuade the public about the actions and intentions of an organization, to a fully integrated participatory approach in governmental decision making. We are most interested in the latter. This particular form of community engagement or public participation can be defined as “...the activities by which people’s concerns, needs, interests, and values are incorporated into decisions and actions on public matters and issues.”¹²

A more expansive definition of community engagement is provided by the Scotland National Standards for Community Engagement:

Community engagement is a purposeful process which develops a working relationship between communities, community organizations and public and private bodies to help them to identify and act on community needs and ambitions. It involves respectful dialogue between everyone involved, aimed at improving understanding between them and taking joint action to achieve positive change.¹³

According to these standards, successful community engagement depends on the key principles of fairness and equality, and a commitment to learning and continuous improvement. They state that high quality community engagement is:

- **effective** – in meeting the needs and expectations of the people involved;
- **efficient** – by being well informed and properly planned; and
- **fair** – by giving people who may face additional barriers to getting involved an equal opportunity to participate.³

At its most robust, community engagement is the coproduction of public policy and action, or collaborative governance, based on the belief that “those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.”¹⁴ This sentiment is at the core of almost all public participation or community engagement efforts.

¹² Nabatchi, Tina, and Leighninger, Matthew. Public Participation for 21st Century Democracy. Bryson Series in Public and Nonprofit Management. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2015, 6

¹³ Scotland National Standards for Community Engagement, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/planning-people/pages/2/>

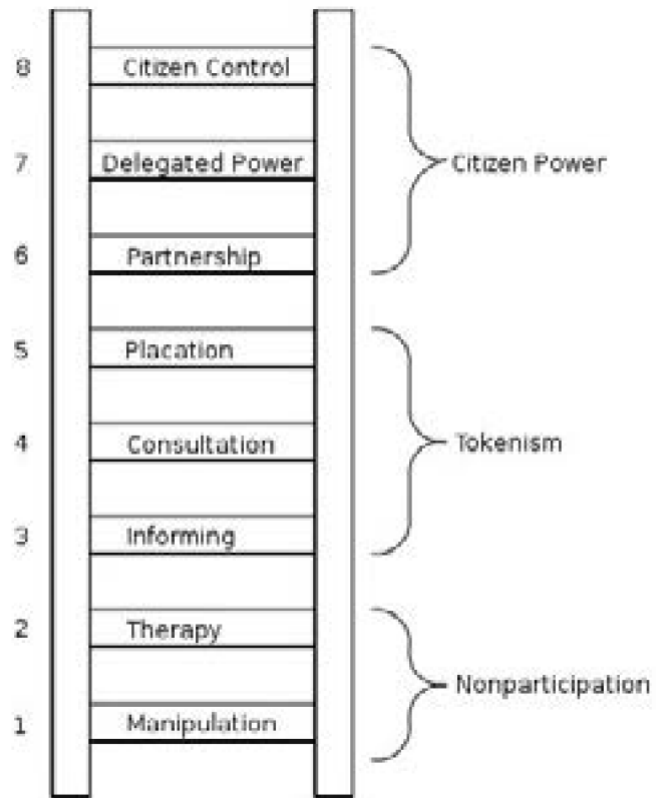
¹⁴ IAP2 Core Values, <https://www.iap2.org/page/corevalues>

FRAMING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS

If we accept that public decision making should, at a minimum, reflect the interests of the public, and more ideally, be significantly informed, or indeed coproduced, by the affected individuals and communities, then the central question becomes how to structure such efforts.

There are many frameworks for classifying or categorizing community engagement. One of the earliest that significantly informs modern practice is Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation.⁵ This model describes three broad categories of participation: Non-participation, Tokenism, and Empowerment, within which are more incremental degrees, described in the online Citizen's Handbook:

- **1 Manipulation and 2 Therapy.** Both are non-participative. The aim is to cure or educate the participants. The proposed plan is best and the job of participation is to achieve public support through public relations.
- **3 Informing.** A most important first step to legitimate participation. But too frequently the emphasis is on a one-way flow of information. No channel for feedback.
- **4 Consultation.** Again a legitimate step that might include attitude surveys, neighbourhood meetings and public enquiries. But Arnstein still feels this is just a window dressing ritual.
- **5 Placation.** For example, co-option of hand-picked 'worthies' onto committees. It allows citizens to advise or plan ad infinitum but retains for power holders the right to judge the legitimacy or feasibility of the advice.
- **6 Partnership.** Power is in fact redistributed through negotiation between citizens and power holders. Planning and decision-making responsibilities are shared e.g. through joint committees.
- **7 Delegation.** Citizens holding a clear majority of seats on committees with delegated powers to make decisions. Public now has the power to assure accountability of the programme to them.
- **8 Citizen Control.** Have-nots handle the entire job of planning, policy making and managing a programme e.g. neighbourhood corporation with no intermediaries between it and the source of funds.⁶




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- 5 Sherry R. Arnstein (1969) A Ladder Of Citizen Participation, Journal of the American Institute of Planners, 35:4, 216-224, DOI: [10.1080/01944366908977225](https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225)
- 6 Citizen's Handbook, <https://citizenshandbook.org/arnsteinsladder.html>

A more contemporary description of the spectrum of public participation comes from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), which similarly sites participatory processes on a spectrum from Informing to Empowerment.¹⁵ This framework is less normative than Arnstein's, emphasizing the need to situate efforts at an appropriate point within the spectrum without necessarily assuming that one end is inherently better than the other in all contexts. However, both spectra are useful descriptive tools by which participatory processes can be evaluated for the level of participation available to the public. IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.

IAP2'S PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM



The IAP2 Federation has developed the Spectrum to help groups define the public's role in any public participation process. The IAP2 Spectrum is quickly becoming an international standard.

		INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION 				
		INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL		To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
	PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. We will seek your feedback on drafts and proposals.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work together with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

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Looking to a more formalized and statutory framework, Scotland's National Standards for Community Engagement, which establish a foundational set of imperatives for community engagement: **shared decision-making**, where communities influence options and the final policies that are implemented; **shared action**, where communities contribute to any action taken as a result of the engagement process; and **support for community-led action**, where communities are best placed to deal with the issues they experience and are supported to take the lead in providing a response. This framework is then supported by a set of standards or core principles that guide public processes.¹⁶

¹⁵ IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation, https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/Spectrum_8.5x11_Print.pdf

¹⁶ Scotland National Standards for Community Engagement, <https://www.scdc.org.uk/what/national-standards>

APPLYING FRAMEWORKS TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Nabatchi & Leighninger further refine this basic process-evaluation framework by applying it to specific community engagement tools. Through this effort, they develop a typology spectrum that describes processes from Thin to Thick, both differentiated from conventional participation forms that are more like the informing and consultation segments from Arnstein and IAP2.

Thin processes include petitions, surveys, social media campaigns, or individual outreach. Thicker efforts include more meaningful and powerful public participation efforts, which while more intensive and time consuming, are also more indicative of a robust effort at citizen empowerment. A list of tactics from thin to thick:

- Social media
- Surveys, polls
- Focus groups
- Online reporting platforms
- Crowdsourcing
- Serious games
- Wiki mapping/writing platforms
- Online networks
- Collaborative planning processes
- Participatory budgeting
- Public deliberation¹⁷

They argue that, compared to genuine participatory efforts, conventional community engagement is intended to uphold order, focusing on accountability and transparency (citizen checks on governmental power) without providing actual participation in decision-making processes.

They note that this form of engagement results in reduced participation because if “‘getting involved’... does not provide them with what they want—**problem-solving, civility, or community**—why should they participate?”¹⁰ Further, they note some of the principal challenges embedded in conventional systems that prevent more participatory governance. The first is governmental:

Most governments have employees tasked with informing and interacting with citizens, either in a particular issue area or by liaising with citizen groups and associations. These staff positions are often occupied by the youngest and most inexperienced employees. Many governments also have commissions and task forces, in areas such as human relations or planning and zoning, which are charged with engaging the public as part of their work. The volunteers serving in these capacities often see their roles as representative, not participatory: they are there to bring the interests and concerns of others to the table, not engage those people directly. Both the employees and the volunteers tend to have only a vague sense of the skills and capacities necessary for productively engaging the public (Lukensmeyer, Goldman, & Stern, 2011).¹⁸

Second, “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

¹⁷ N & L 2015, 262. 10

¹⁸ N & L 2015, 7, citing Lukensmeyer, Carolyn J., Joseph P. Goldman, & David Stern. (2011). Assessing public participation in an open government era: A review of federal agency plans. Washington, DC: IBM Center for the Business of Government.

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.”¹⁹

However, simply using participatory tools and tactics does not guarantee actual participation. Nabatchi and Leighninger list a few keys traits of ‘good’ participation, which are comparable to Scotland’s Community Engagement Standards:

- Adult-adult relationships
- Provide factual information
- Sound group process techniques
- Let people tell their stories
- Provides real choices (not selling pre-determined choices)
- Gives participants a sense of political legitimacy
- Provides participants w/ options for taking action
- Makes participation enjoyable
- Easy & convenient to participate in²⁰

These vital attributes of community engagement processes can be distilled into a few basic typologies. First, **who** is at the table? Second, **how** do they interact? And third, **what** are they empowered to do? From these essential questions, we can parse out some general elements that affect how ‘thick’ the process is:

- **Who** is at the table? (People)

- Organizing

- Recruitment

- Inclusion

- **How** do they interact? (Process)

- Mediation

- Communication

- Addressing emotion/conflict

- **What** are they empowered to do? (Product)

- Issue exploration

- Empowerment

- Decision making

¹⁹ N & L 2015, 291.

²⁰ N & L 2015, 25.

DESCRIBING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CAPACITY-BUILDING PROVIDERS

There are currently a multitude of organizations, agencies, and groups that provide services and resources falling under the umbrella of ‘community engagement’ at all levels of governance. In order to better describe the types of services and resources, we began by compiling a broad list of organizations working in community engagement. The only limits were that the groups would be outside formal academic programs and working in the United States (though both of these were later relaxed as important organizations and efforts were discovered, many of which were based in academic settings). In the end, any organization or institute that claimed to be furthering the aims of community engagement outside of explicitly degree—or academic certificate-seeking coursework was included. This list was composed of resources provided by the research leads as well as internet searches. It was augmented throughout the process as new organizations were cited in interviews or referred by groups already identified.

As groups were added, their contribution to community engagement was cataloged and organized, resulting in a general typology derived from common attributes. We started with three categories to classify organizations: those that provide information and resources, those that professionally consult or facilitate community engagement efforts, and those that provide community engagement training for professionals. As we compiled a list of “service providers,” it became clear that there was significant overlap across categories, as well as several sub-categories within the broad groupings.

The first group, those that provide information and resources, range from organizations that produce original research and conduct surveys (e.g., Public Agenda), either on community engagement efforts generally or on specific policy or local problems and efforts, to general clearinghouses for information and resources produced by other groups and individuals (e.g., National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation). Within this group are also organizations that facilitate peer-to-peer information exchange, either through public forums, symposia, and conferences, or by facilitating direct peer-to-peer conversations among professionals. Notably, while many of the groups that fall under this category do not provide either training or consultation/facilitation, most of the groups that do offer those services also provide some level of information as a foundation for their work.

The second group of organizations is those that provide consultation or facilitation services on specific policy or community issues. These organizations typically act as mediators or neutral arbiters for collaborative governance efforts in communities, either formally (e.g., Oregon Consensus and Oregon Solutions) or through social media platforms (e.g., Kitchen Table Democracy and Public Agenda) that connect individuals across broad political spectra. The organizations in this group differ from the other two in that they generally do not provide a service that directly enhances the capacity of policymakers and public officials to conduct community engagement, but rather fill capacity gaps by bringing disparate actors together to do community engagement work toward a specific outcome.

The final group, and the one of most interest to this project, are those organizations that provide various training programs that enhance the capacity of policymakers and public officials to conduct community engagement efforts. In general, these organizations provide course curricula, seminars, and programs to policymakers with the intent of developing skills and offering tools that allow those professionals to undertake community engagement efforts more effectively and successfully. Within this group, there are two general categories of service: training provided by private individuals and companies (e.g., Bleiker Training) and training by institutes located within academic institutions (e.g., Davenport Institute and Institute for Policy and Civic Engagement). It is an open question whether this distinction is helpful in understanding the demand for training by local governments or any substantive outcomes.

After the general categorization above, we shifted our focus to the final category, those organizations that provide direct training in community engagement. The rationale for this was twofold. First, the intent of our research is to provide a base of knowledge for possible future training or consultation offered through the Center for Public Service at PSU. Programs in this category are therefore likely to be the most relevant and the most important to understand more deeply. Second, this smaller group has outcomes that are not related to specific policy domains, but to community engagement as a discipline. This focus allows us to home in on the most critical and requisite skills and tools that apply broadly to community engagement efforts without being limited or tailored to specific policy domains. By investigating and cataloging these groups, it should be easier to make general observations about community engagement practices and tools as well as making it easier to compare providers and to identify overlap and, more critically, gaps in the skills and tools necessary for effective community engagement.

Information available online about specific training programs is relatively sparse and non-specific, relying more on intent and general rhetoric about the importance of community engagement rather than focusing on the specific skills or tools that an organization's training programs provide. However, based on internet research and the experience of our project team regarding the content of specific programs, we were able to identify meaningful skills and tools that organizations and consultants provide, including:

- Collaborative Governance/Action
- Leadership Development
- Conflict Resolution
- Issue Exploration
- Decision-Making
- Dealing w/ Conflict/Emotion
- Facilitation/Mediation
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Community Organizing
- Participatory Planning/Budgeting
- Communication and Outreach
- Engagement Strategy and Design
- Methods and Tools
- Digital Engagement

To this list, we can add the “ten key talents for engaging citizens” from the Participation Skills Module provided by Nabatchi & Leighinger:

1. Building coalitions and networks;
2. Recruiting participants;
3. Communicating about participation;
4. Managing conflict;
5. Providing information and options;
6. Managing discussions;
7. Helping participants generate ideas;
8. Helping participants make group decisions;
9. Supporting action efforts; and
10. Evaluating participation.²¹

The theoretical constructs and skill lists provide us with a framework we can use to evaluate other training and participation regimes or develop our own. To test this approach, we first need an overview of participatory efforts and training regimes. Restricting our attention to those in Oregon, we focused on two formal organizations: Oregon Consensus and Oregon Solutions, both of which provide third-party services in the state that aid or conduct community engagement/public participation efforts.

²¹ Wiley Online, <https://www.wiley.com/en-us/Public+Participation+for+21st+Century+Democracy-p-9781118688403>

Oregon Consensus was established by the Oregon legislature in 1989 to professionalize community dispute mediation, and today acts as a forum that conducts multi-party dispute resolution on public policy questions throughout the state. Oregon Solutions, established by the legislature in 2001, is designated by the governor to aggregate resources and identify stakeholders and subject matter experts to aid public participation and collaborative governance efforts. While they act in different segments of community engagement programs, it is useful to review their efforts in light of both the framework spectra and skills discussed above.

The list of skills above is not exhaustive and is not grounded in a systematic structure or epistemology. We compiled the list inductively, and a more rigorous approach would connect the specific skills to a more robust deductive scaffold. Some are indeed specialized skills (such as inclusion, or bringing underrepresented voices into collaborative processes, or dealing with conflict and emotion in a public discourse setting); some are models of collaborative processes (such as participatory planning/budgeting); and some are process-oriented (such as decision-making or mediation).

At the same time, our list does yield meaningful information. First, it reveals priorities for various training programs, whether based on specific skills or aspirational ideals. Perhaps most importantly, it is a step towards refinement of a working definition for ‘community engagement,’ which initial research shows is fairly broad in application and used differently in different contexts. This is an important point. Without a specific definition that drives a sound theoretical framework, it is hard to imagine developing a program of professional training that is more than a toolbox to be deployed for better or worse by practitioners depending on their preferences and qualities. While this is often what local government staff are looking for (immediate help with specific plans or projects), a responsible approach to training and consultation would situate these practical tools and techniques within a larger programmatic context.

THE CRUCIAL LINK BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY CAPACITY

In addition to the national organizations we cover in this report, there are countless local organizations that specialize in developing leadership skills within their communities and empowering their members to engage in government decision making processes. A future analysis of these groups throughout Oregon would further add to our understanding of how these programs potentially enhance engagement capacity and how they are different or similar to the training programs designed for government professionals. Such an analysis could also provide an opportunity to evaluate whether the frameworks and skills derived from the perspective of policy makers and government staff are applicable, in alignment, or divergent with those received within the community (which are generally less formally structured, less constrained by bureaucratic rigidity, and potentially more adaptable to changes in government leadership). We emphasize that building local government capacity for engagement is inextricably linked to building participation capacity within the community.

THE SWEET SPOT FOR CAPACITY BUILDING

Based on our empirical research, we hypothesize a possible “Sweet Spot” for community engagement for consideration in the theoretical literature. It suggests that the opportunities and challenges are different for communities of different sizes. Because larger cities and counties have more resources, while smaller cities and towns have closer personal relationships between government and residents, we hypothesize an inverse relationship between formal institutionalization of community engagement and informal relationship building. We offer these possible dynamics, described in the figure below, as a both a hypothesis for academic research and a consideration for local jurisdictions as they balance their investment in formal structures with a commitment to relationship building.

The "Sweet Spot"

