



SUCCESSFULLY ENGAGING WITH UNDERREPRESENTED COMMUNITIES FOR COMPREHENSIVE PLANS

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Community engagement is a powerful tool to guide investments towards the places we inhabit. To be successful, we must provide equitable access to engagement and encourage input from as much of the community as possible. Here are some key components to expanding participation with underserved and diverse populations:

- **Go to where people are already meeting.** Work with local partners to identify and set up engagement opportunities at: 1) Places where we are likely to run into a broad cross section of the community (grocery stores, laundromat, parks, daycare, libraries, coffee shops, community centers, farmer's markets, and bus stops) - these "Pop-Up Meetings" can include a tent and tables, and bring the engagement activities to the locations people frequent; 2) Organizations working with the focus population (ethnic / cultural organizations, clinics, churches) - these "Listening Sessions" are opportunities to interact directly with an organization's members.
- **Work with a Community Organizer.** Hire someone from each of the focus communities to serve as liaison between the project and the focus population.
- **Put flyers in resident mailboxes.**
- **Offer a meal and childcare** (and advertise these) for engagement activities at any scale (from small listening sessions to large open houses). Work with the host organization to hire a local caterer or business that offers food that is of the host community's preference.
- **Make it social and fun.** Create opportunities for people to interact with each other as they learn about the project and provide their comments. Offer opportunities for small group conversations and interactions. Develop hands-on activities. Minimize presentation time and use rich visual explanations. Include local artists/performers at events to leverage local strengths and help build community networks.
- **Provide user-friendly materials,** richly illustrated with brief text and compelling design.
- **Provide materials in the language of the focus populations, as well as in accessible (ADA) formats.** At a minimum, provide "project entry" materials (project facts, introduction to the project and opportunities to participate. Moreover, provide interpreters and translators as anticipated depending on location.
- **Work with ethnic / cultural media.** Develop and send press releases. Purchase ads that explain the project and describe why it matters, and outline opportunities for engagement.
- **Respect people's time.** Develop a process that is engaging and that asks useful questions. Participants are giving a gift of their time - quickly gather / publish / disseminate results, and bring recommendations from engagement into the project's products. Make the event social, fun and useful - what do participants actually get from the time they are giving to the project? Potentially offer incentives (bus tickets, meal tickets, books, etc.) to compensate for their time.



Traditional methods of hosting public meetings in the evening don't work well for reaching members of the community who might otherwise be interested in engaging. Second-shift workers are at work, families are just getting home from work and have no childcare, or host locations where underserved populations can't easily access a meeting. Language and physical access can also be barriers.

Define engagement objectives, goals and tactics to ensure equity. This begins with understanding the demographics and socio/economic fabric of the community. Then look at the subject area as a composition of smaller sub-areas or zones; these may be identified by ethnic or neighborhood groups, physical boundaries, access and proximity to existing infrastructure. Understanding who is where and what their barriers are to the engagement process, be it language, or schedule, or physical access, or comfort level with an approach, will empower us to tailor custom approaches to engaging all populations, especially the underserved.

