



## CASE STUDIES WITH RESPONSES:

### Case Study #1: Mississippi Mobile Home Community

You have been asked to collect information from residents at a mobile home community in Pascagoula, Mississippi near the Casotte Bayou, an area that has not historically been included in the planning process. This survey collection process will require you to go door-to-door and collect first-hand information; the residents do not have reliable email or phone numbers. The temperature has reached 100-degrees in the shade and you will need to navigate through the thick, wet mud surrounding the homes. As you and your group start walking through the community with your clip boards, you notice many of the residents looking skeptical of your presence.

- How do you approach the residents?
- How do you find ways to relate to their concerns?
- How do you intend to present the results of the survey and share their story?

#### Response:

**First impressions:** Dress accordingly (probably not a good idea to wear a suit), split the group into pairs so as to not be overbearing. Know how to pronounce names of places in their area (be the expert). Gain trust and talk about common knowledge, people, and places (small talk). Hide the clipboards and memorize the survey questions, have conversations and get people to tell their story.

**Listening:** Some folks do not know how to read or understand English, so you may want to have someone with who can speak another language. Gain an understanding of their perspective and how they see their future.

**Outcomes:** Put a face and an image to the outcomes. Survey results should be shown in portraits instead of statistics for these residents; it's not about the numbers. What would their life be like if all the plan recommendations were realized?

### Case Study #2: Post-Disaster Roundtable

You have been asked to facilitate one of 20 roundtable discussions at a nearby school in a community that has just experienced a devastating natural disaster. You are there to help with the planning for a 20-year vision of what the community would like to see in the future. The school is the only building standing within the unincorporated community of Saucier in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

- How do you market and get the word out for this type of meeting?
- How do you reach out to the community leaders and residents?
- How do you structure the meeting?



- How do you facilitate your table at the meeting?
- How do you speak with residents who have just lost everything?
- How do you ask them to imagine what their community will look like in 20 years?

**Special note: How could you relate this to events in Minnesota such as tornadoes or seasonal flooding?**

**Response:**

**First Impressions:** There is a special skill set needed to be a good listener in this situation. You will not be successful with your project unless you are compassionate, empathetic, optimistic, and have a good attitude. This type of meeting requires additional efforts to get the word out, e.g., through flyers at libraries, letters home with students at school to give to their parents, connecting with FEMA and other agencies that are housing the residents in shelters and temporary trailers. Use the news and radio channels to advertise and promote the meeting.

**Listening:** You cannot build rapport with this group unless you recognize that people are experiencing a heightened level of stress and one should respond appropriately. At the meeting, use a visual preference survey. The facilitated table discussion should include everyone telling their story, so make time for this process. Have conversations and use razor-sharp interpersonal communication skills. This calls for the ability to exhibit an enormous amount of tact, an extremely thick skin, have grace under pressure, courage under fire, and openness to criticism and tolerance beyond belief.

**Outcomes:** As part of your planning, make sure to have on-hand knowledge of resources, or resource persons, for immediate needs. FEMA, insurance companies, and other related aid agencies may be helpful to residents while their focus is still in crisis mode. Ask for ways to keep in touch through email or phone for follow up information and next steps. Lastly, make the residents feel valued by acknowledging their role and their contributions, and provide as much information about the process as needed.

**Case Study #3: Underserved and Underrepresented Communities**

You are seated at a community meeting in your local park. The goal of the meeting is to obtain feedback on a park master plan. People from a variety of cultural backgrounds are in attendance, which is not the norm. The facilitator stands in front of the room, pans the audience and says, “One of our aims of this project is to engage low-income, low-educational attainment, non-white, non-English speaking residents because they don’t come to the parks as often as we would like.” You see a small group of residents, who are not white, look at each other with an expression that reads, “He shouldn’t have said that.”

- What was wrong with the facilitator’s opening comments?
- What in your view should have been the opening comments?
- What other strategies can be used to connect with underserved and underrepresented audiences to obtain feedback on plans besides community meetings?



## Response:

**First impressions:** The opening welcome should include a warm greeting and appreciation that people took the time to attend. Practice Radical Hospitality by featuring treats from vendors that might reflect the preferences of the participants. Frame the description of the project in positive terms that articulate that community input is key. Do not use a deficit approach when referencing the community.

**Listening:** Plan in advance with your project partners/team to have interpreters if necessary. Some folks do not know how to read or understand English, so you may want to have someone with you who can speak another language. Ask the group, “Who owns the parks?” During the ensuing conversation, let them know that tax payers own the parks and that includes them; They are entitled to have an opportunity to shape the amenities that they pay for. For the small group conversations, have the facilitators ask if anyone is from another country. If there are immigrant participants, ask how the public is engaged in park planning in their native land and then briefly explain why we do community engagement here and why it matters. Also find out if there are local gathering spaces/public events where they feel at ease.

**Outcomes:** Tell the participants what will be done with the comments they provide. Ask them if they would like you to follow up with them in some way about the outcome of this project. If participants express that they would like you to follow up, ask them what format works best, e.g., a presentation, email (this information should be on the sign-in sheets). Other strategies to consider besides community meetings are “pop-up” engagement activities that bring the planner to a community event to gather data.

## Case Study #4: No Community-Based Networks

You oversee a planning project that includes the call to engage underrepresented stakeholders from your service area. Since you currently don't have the staff capacity, you decide to craft a request-for-proposal to get some help with the planning and engagement work. After vetting a few proposals, you select a consultant who has experience with planning and conducting engagement sessions on a wide-range of topics. At the first planning meeting, the consultant asks you for a list of individuals and organizations in your area, and your existing relationship base, because he would like to initiate the engagement work right away. You don't have such a list. You realize that this person is unqualified to reach the target populations you seek.

- What do you do now?
- In hindsight, where do you think the misstep occurred?
- What strategies can an organization act on to foster a stable relationship base of individuals and organizations?



## Response:

**First impressions:** Investigate what you can do to add an engagement practitioner to this project. Since the first consultant is not familiar with the intended stakeholders, it's an open question whether this consultant is a good fit for the engagement work.

**Listening:** Connect with other organizations that have hired consultants in your desired physical and demographic geography. Look to see if the consultants have established community-based partnerships in their work histories.

**Outcomes:** When working with consultants, it is critical that their best engagement ideas and practices can be put into play. Consultants have indicated that they are at “the mercy” of the hiring organization and that they are often not given the go-ahead to implement strategies that would work best.

