

# INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES FOR INVOLVING AND ENGAGING CITIZENS



*Instructor:*

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Mission: AmericaSpeaks' mission is to reinvigorate American democracy by engaging citizens in the public decisions that most impact their lives. This is a nonprofit organization.

Key principals:

1. Link to decision makers
2. Demographic Diversity
3. Informed participation
4. Facilitated deliberation
5. Discovery of shared priorities
6. Clear recommendations for action
7. Sustained citizen participation

Goals for Public Deliberation

1. Achieve effective policy results
2. Develop an important degree of shared agreement with the public
3. Foster public's support for government action

People want to talk about the issues they care about.

This course is about getting greater levels of public support.

The traditional public hearing or meeting:

Is speaker-focused

Often engages the 'usual suspects': stakeholders and citizens already active on specific issues

The experts just deliver the information

Participants share anecdotal evidence

Citizens air individual ideas and concerns

Have limited reporting of participant input or influence afterward

Deliberative forums:

Are participant-focused

They reach into diverse populations, including citizens not usually active, with efforts to reach the under-represented

Participants use detailed, balanced, background materials written by experts

Citizens identify shared ideas and concerns and assign them relative priority through facilitator-led small group discussions

Have detailed reporting of participant input (during and/or after the meeting)

Design of Public Engagement: Questions (Requires a lot of preparation)

1. Outcome: What kind of outcome are you seeking?
2. Issues: What are the issues to be addressed? Are there pre-existing conflicts to be aware of?
3. Impact: What influence and impact should the process have? Are key public officials supportive and will they be involved?
4. Who involved: Who and how many should be involved?
5. Representation: How to attract representative participants?

6. Constraints: What time and resource constraints do you have?
7. Forum/Process Format: What is the best format for the public forum?
8. Result: What happens after the public forum/deliberation? What is the link to action/decision?

Getting people to meetings:

General Tips on Outreach

Make invitations as personal as possible

Have people promote with their circles of trust and influence

Emphasize why it's important to participate

-What's in it for me?

-Why is this important to my organization?

People need a sense that it matters.

TIP #1

Set clear goals for participation

This initial task drives the outreach plan

Ask yourself: "who needs to be involved and in what numbers?"

Adopt goals for overall participation as well as important demographics

Identify the "hard to reach" - These can be low income people, seniors, people with language barriers, etc.

Be conscience about who you want at the meeting.

TIP #2

Use pre-registration

Use online and/or paper registration

Get commitments from people that they'll attend

Track important demographics, age, gender, etc.

Check progress regularly

Adjust outreach strategy as needed

TIP#3

Have a diverse Outreach Team

Include the diversity you want at the meeting

Craft message and create recruitment materials

Design an outreach plan with specific tasks and timeline

Assign all tasks to specific people

Develop communications strategy to assist outreach

TIP #4

Use Organizational Networks

Make an expanded list of organizations and groups to contact

Get buy-in from key organizations

Set specific recruitment targets for groups that agree to help

-Be optimistic, but realistic

-Helpful for getting a demographic balance

This involves a "circle of trust". You have to think in an expanded way.

#### TIP #5

Target your public invitations

Identify the segments of the general public you want to reach - be as specific as possible

Design public invitations to reach targeted groups

- Distribute flyers where they shop
- Promote on radio stations they listen to
- Contact churches where they worship
- Post information on websites they visit

"People come to meeting based on personal outreach."

#### TIP #6

Make Extra Efforts for the Hard To Reach

The hard to reach are hard to reach

Need to develop a special strategy

Allocate extra resources

Find recruiters within the hard to reach groups

Remove barriers to participation

\*Provide refreshments, be creative, offer childcare, coloring books, transportation to the meeting

#### TIP #7

Follow Up with Interested People

It's like real estate, only 3 things matter: follow up, follow up, follow up

Emails to all who are registered

Calls to key individuals and organizations

Focus on the hard to reach and other key demographic groups

Obtaining Effective Input: Key Questions to Ask

\*Citizen understanding: What do citizens need to know and understand to provide effective input?

-What materials do you need to create to enhance citizens' learning?

\*Design Content: How do you align the materials with good meeting design?

\*\*\*Power of small groups: How do we leverage the power of small group discussions?

Single voice vs. collective voice meetings?

\*Theming and Polling: How can theming of ideas and polling on key issues be of greatest use?

Note: During this seminar, the instructors had us use Turning Point clickers for instant polling results. While my opinion is that these would be an unnecessary expense, maybe we can find an app to help us poll during meetings.

What do citizens need to know? Developing the content:

Choose topics: Choose the key topic areas to be discussed during the meeting

Background and context: Prepare background and contextual information you provide prior to and during the meeting

-What reports exist?

-What is the history of the issue?

-Which details will be contentious?

Research and data: Conduct research and/or compile key data/statistics

-What facts and figures will inform the participant regarding outcome and frame?

Brief synthesis: How do we boil it down to something brief and understandable?

Interactive Design<-- --> Content Process

Program design and discussion materials

Thinking through an Effective Program

1. Sequence the presentation and discussions in a coherent order

2. Adequate timing for key program elements

3. Discussion questions link to program outcomes

4. Polling questions allow for prioritization of presented or participant-generated options

5. Promote individual and collective learning

Small group discussions: How to do them well if you have time and space

Roundtables: Set up the room in roundtable format

Clear Directions: Craft clear instructions and discussion questions

Clear Outcomes: Be clear what output you want from small groups

Facilitators: Recruit discussion leaders or facilitators who can lead good, small group discussions

Orientations: Orient discussion leaders ahead of time about good principals of facilitation

Real-time Collection: Collect their information in the meeting

\*Make sure people feel they have been heard

Theming Citizen's Ideas

Reinforces that citizens' voices are being heard

Fast cycle feedback/quick summary of conversation

Allows options to be generated, identifies gems

Reduces grandstanding - Some people can set the wrong tone... use instructions to set the right tone!

Avoids repeating ideas in report-backs

Further refines ideas to encourage deeper conversation

Theming: Paper vs. Computer

If you use paper:

Use note cards and sticky notes at the table

Runners' role

Organize notes on a large wall to synthesize (need a small team of people to do this)

Develop themes on post-its

Create theme slides to present

If you use computer:

Every table should have a laptop - connected to wirelessly to a network

Tables submit key ideas to Theme Team (TT)

TT members review ideas and develop recurring themes

Create theme slides for lead facilitator to present

Paper or Keypad Polling

Paper/Manual:

Show of hands, use of fingers and thumbs, use of cards, written surveys

Wireless Keypads:

Everyone receives a polling keypad, their vote is anonymous

Polling Questions:

Tests of fact, demographics, opinions and perspectives, ranking and prioritizing, rate level of support or agreement for options, have fun

Ensuring Success with Input

\*Skills you need on a public engagement team:

Project and Process Design that builds momentum toward ultimate success

Outreach strategy and management that can recruit from all segments of the jurisdiction

Meeting design and facilitation that fully engages people's minds and hearts

Framing content that enables productive discussion

\*Commitment you need on a public engagement team

Using the "public knowledge" generated to fully inform final decisions/plans

Why should officials involve the public?

With deliberate forums, the forums and the results are often seen as:

More legitimate

More informed - reflect reasonable choices based on good information

Consensus-based - shared view of problem and solution

Supportable - extends beyond those directly involved

Small group discussion... Jen's input:

What is your biggest challenge in terms of recruiting citizens to participate in meetings?

JB:

Working around people's "busy" schedules

Meeting times

Getting the word out

Government can be viewed by some as boring

Addressing information in public can be intimidating

Government may not be trusted

People can be complacent

People don't attend when they think things are good

What is your biggest challenge in terms of getting good input from those who do attend meetings?

JB: Helping them state their information in three meeting effectively

Which ideas were most helpful to you?

JB:

The human equation to getting the word out. I would like to see our city do fun and entertaining email blasts about upcoming topics on our agendas. Many times, we know when a topic will be discussed weeks in advance. We need to reach out to HOAs and communities where the topics will affect the people.

I like the fact that solutions have been given to eliminate excuses. Providing transportation to a meeting or childcare for working moms. These are things our city can do.

What would be the challenges in implementing these suggestions in your city?

JB:

Some people just won't come to the meetings.

Money.

JB's Idea: When we have issues coming up on an agenda, why don't we send out surveys to the public? Email surveys can be done free of charge and we can get a better sense of what the people want. Re: seniors, we can ask Benevilla to do surveys with their senior clients when dropping off groceries or prescriptions. We should reach out to churches and populations of people who may be affected by what we're deciding.