ELEVATED CHICAGO

Community Engagement Principles & Recommendations

ELEVATED Chicago SM

CONNECTING PEOPLE,
BUILDING EQUITY

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A list of individuals serving on our Steering Committee and Working Groups is available at ElevatedChicago.org.

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This document has been prepared by Foresight Design Initiative and Borderless Studio. Photograph provided by Brandon Fields.

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A Living Document Format

Elevated Chicago presents its Community Engagement Principles & Recommendations as a living document, that should evolve and grow as we learn from new practices for more meaningful engagement. Thus, this document was built to live in a binder—with each principle in its own section that can expand with more relevant inspiration, resources, and tools; and the last section can hold the broadly-applicable case studies and best practices you find along the way. Each blank page is a space for your notes and ideas.

We look forward to advancing this learning journey with you.

Introduction

Many recognize the importance of engaging community in decisions about the built environment but struggle to do so effectively. This document lays out 8 principles—with recommendations and strategies to support each—to create more meaningful and mutually beneficial opportunities for the residents most directly affected to participate in decision making processes.

This document is for practitioners working on the front lines of community engagement from local government and planning agencies to developers and community-based organizations. While there is an emphasis on the built environment, the principles herein are intended to be applicable in a variety of contexts from participatory budgeting to planning a community garden or mural project.

As part of Elevated Chicago's mission—to improve the built environment for greater racial equity, climate resilience, health, and arts and culture outcomes—this coalition of 17 organizations believes there is a real opportunity to rethink community engagement.

Being on the front lines of community engagement is difficult, and sometimes frustrating, work. You are face-to-face with the hardships and tensions that residents are struggling with, often without the ability to directly address them. At the same time, you know you need to foster trust and keep residents engaged, because meaningful, productive engagement leads to better outcomes for communities, and the city as whole. With limited resources, limited time, and limited tools for effective engagement, it is hard to look and strive beyond the status quo.

Elevated Chicago wants to be a catalyst for strengthening community engagement in Chicago. With this initial set of principles—combed from local and national best practices and innovative ideas—Elevated Chicago hopes to start an ongoing dialogue with decision makers about challenging ourselves to do more, better.

Best Practices in Budgeting for Community Engagement

Looking to national best practices, we have found a number of emerging trends that are worth considering when allocating community engagement resources.

1. **Dedicate a Clear Line Item**
   Planning for community engagement while project budgets are being drafted is a critical first step in ensuring resources are dedicated to this important work. This requires advocating for dedicated resources and ensuring they allow for long-term engagement and ownership over the life of the project and beyond, rather than just a lump sum for pre-development at the beginning of the project.

   When creating a line item for community engagement, consider the following engagement-related costs:
   - Staff time to coordinate, as well as incorporate feedback
   - Compensation and recognition of partners and participants
   - Outreach expenses
   - Event and meeting costs (e.g. venue, food, child care, interpretation, materials, etc.)

2. **Set a Percentage**
   There is no one-size-fits-all community engagement process and budget, but a best practice for organizations investing in built environment projects is to set a minimum percentage of the total project to ongoing community engagement. For instance, when the U.S. Department Housing and Urban Development launched the Smart Communities Initiative they recommended that at least 10% of project funding be dedicated to community engagement.

3. **Consider Costs of Not Engaging Communities**
   While the value of meaningful community engagement is difficult to quantify, remember the cost of little, poor, or no engagement can be staggering. Community opposition can result in significant costs associated with permit or construction delays, if not millions in sunk costs if the project never gets off the ground. From the perspective of developers and local government, it is not just a potential financial hit at stake, but also their reputation and community trust and acceptance—without which can hinder future projects.

4. **Pursue Further Research**
   We recognize that meaningful community engagement, especially that which upholds the following principles, requires resources, and definitively more funding than is currently allocated across the board. As research on the return on investment of community engagement pushes on, we hope to one day be able to share a cost benefit framework that presents the costs and benefits to all parties of each potential engagement strategy, across a spectrum from the minimum adequate to much deeper and more meaningful engagement.

Patterns to Examine

There are several dominant community engagement patterns that recur in Chicago—each contributing to the widespread erosion of trust in both the engagement process and the institutions leading them.

The first is repeated planning without resources for implementation. Residents across Chicago's communities have grown weary of being involved in planning initiative after planning initiative, without seeing the resources and action follow to bring that plan to life. Planning fatigue leads to frustration and a decline in participation over time.

The second pattern manifests where the default engagement effort is to simply share information without gathering input. Community residents are often convened and informed once agendas have been set and decisions made. If residents are involved in built environment decision making at all, it often happens late in the process. This pattern is often the result of community engagement that is reactive rather than proactive. When communities are not adequately informed and engaged early on, it reinforces a threat response, and puts decision makers on the defensive.

Finally, another challenging pattern—perhaps born out of the previous two—is participation only by the "usual suspects;" meaning the same engagement practices lead to the same folks showing up. We need to reflect on the question of whether the loudest and most active voices are genuinely representative of a diverse community. Recent research from the city of Boston reveals that community meeting on issues of zoning and housing skews toward older, more affluent, and more invested residents—who are more likely to promote NIMBYism (Florida 2018). This can be seen in Chicago. The status quo of community engagement privileges those that may advocate for their own vested interests or agendas, potentially in opposition to the wellbeing of their neighbors and community as a whole.

It is not enough to call out these patterns. We must collectively examine the conditions that hold them in place. These include, but are not limited to:

- City budget constraints on incentivizing broader participation (i.e., funding for food, child care, or transportation reimbursements, let alone more creative engagement methods).
- Lack of a city-wide standard for community engagement processes, particularly when it comes to the built environment.
- No clear mechanism for sharing lessons learned and best practices around community engagement; or receiving feedback from community residents themselves.
- When not directly addressed, eroded trust can hinder progress on building strong relationships with needed community-based partners.
- Inherent competing commitments of decision makers to diverse stakeholders makes transparency and trust harder to broker.
- Inadequate training and support for those on the front lines to conduct robust, authentic engagement activities.
- Project timelines do not offer sufficient opportunity for engagement.
- Limited or no budget for marketing participation opportunities.
- Lack of coordination around scheduling events and meetings leads to competition or saturation in specific neighborhoods.

Today's Opportunity

Despite these negative patterns, there are inspiring practices to hold up as the gold standards for community engagement around Chicago's built environment. The Metropolitan Planning Council's Corridor Development Initiative, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning's (CMAP) ON TO 2050 regional plan, the Center for Neighborhood Technology's RainReady program, and the Chicago Department of Public Health's Chicago Area HIV Integrated Services Council represent some of Chicago's best in class examples, which we will highlight throughout this document.

Curious How to Practice Better Community Engagement?

This document will help you with the Why, What, and How.

WHY? Principles

WHAT? Specific Recommendations

HOW? Strategies, Suggestions, Tools, Case Studies

There is a real opportunity to think anew about community engagement. City staff on the front lines of engaging residents are eager to improve their relationships, tools, and methods. Efforts such as Elevated Chicago and Resilient Chicago are catalyzing new conversations that can help advance engagement beyond the status quo, break out of tired patterns, and rebuild trust in decision making processes.

New Framework, New Mindset

Building on the International Association for Public Participation spectrum, Elevated Chicago puts forth an adapted framework (Table 1) for working towards an optimized community engagement process that results in greater community ownership.

Community engagement does not end when a structure is built or project implemented—residents should have an ongoing role to play in its stewardship and ownership. Analyses of Chicago's current built environment decision making processes have shown lack of ownership (of land, businesses, homes, etc.)

to be a significant contributing factor to racial wealth gap, resident displacement, and other quality of life challenges in many of Chicago's low-income neighborhoods and communities of color. Across Elevated Chicago's own robust community engagement processes, community ownership has emerged as one of the strongest neighborhood-level "asks." Ongoing ownership enables residents to be more effective, better-informed participants and leaders in community engagement processes.

At the core of moving from "inform" to "ownership" across this community engagement spectrum is respect. We must collectively respect each other in terms of our place within the decision-making dynamic, our power, our viewpoints, our life experiences, our privilege, and our relationship to the communities in which we live, work, and play.

Table 1: Spectrum of Public Participation

Adapted from the International Association for Public Participation

	Public Participation Goal	Promise to the Public
Inform	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities, and/or solutions.	We will keep you informed.
Consult	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.
Involve	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	We will work with you to ensure your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.
Collaborate	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate you advice and recommendations into the decision to the maximum extent possible.
Empower	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.	We will implement what you decide.
Own	*To share or place ownership in the hands of community leaders to activate, manage, and maintain the outcome.*	*We will provide or transfer full or partial ownership of this project to you.*

Principles & Recommendations

PRINCIPLE 1

Shift our Mindset

Let's change our thinking! There are a few key mindsets that should be adopted when engaging communities.

1. See Value in All Voices
2. Redefine "Community"
3. (Re)Build Trust
4. Foster Collective Learning
5. Be Mindful About Timelines
6. Commit to an Action-Oriented Process

"Despite generations of segregation, disinvestment and disengagement with communities of color in our City, we are today uniting our exceptional grassroots and thought leadership to collectively take on issues on racial equity, climate resilience and improved health outcomes. Elevated Chicago was activated at the confluence of these efforts, and we are galvanized by the voices of our communities who are advancing creative solutions to these problems, neighborhood by neighborhood."

—Juan Carlos Linares, LUCHA

1 Shift Our Mindset

Let's change our thinking! There are a few key mindsets that should be adopted when engaging communities.

1. **See Value in All Voices**
   When it comes to decision making around the built environment in Chicago, we exist in a culture that stratifies voices—giving some more weight than others. Political and social power dynamics are constantly at play. But as leaders on the front lines of community engagement, we must bring a mindset that sees value in all voices. We must internalize an equity mindset and we must practice it in our actions.

2. **Redefine "Community"**
   We need to break down the notion that communities are monolithic. A meeting room full of "usual suspects" on a given evening does not necessarily constitute "the community." It is far more nuanced. "Community" is a network of individuals, each with unique perspectives and insights, connected by a shared lived experience of their neighborhood (or other context).

   When we set community engagement goals or metrics of success, we need to aim for more than the number of residents who show up to a meeting. And when we seek "community partners," the goal cannot be as simple as finding "representatives" of a collective viewpoint, which is unlikely to exist. Our goal should be more about finding network nodes—individuals with broad social networks who can extend the reach, diversity, and richness of the conversation.

   We need to challenge the status quo by asking ourselves:

   - What are all the voices needed to more fully and legitimately weigh in on behalf of the community?
   - What perspectives are missing? How might we better engage them?
   - How can we be more specific and transparent about who was present, and wasn't, during decision making?

> **"Outreach managers really must do their homework. One thing I consistently hear is, "I never heard about this, you didn't reach me." This kind of rhetoric can really put a bad energy in the air. Therefore, it's important that the manager conduct far reaching marketing to refute the idea that only certain people were sought. If you as a manager cannot express your outreach methodology and that methodology cannot express a process as inclusive as possible, you will likely be in trouble."**
>
> **— Local Community Engagement Practitioner**

3. **Rebuild Trust**
   We need to acknowledge that residents' trust in both (1) community development decision makers and (2) the related decision-making processes has been eroded, if it was ever present in the first place. The reasons for this are many (see *Patterns to Examine*). Our best way forward is to take every opportunity to acknowledge past mistakes and rebuild trust through both words and actions.

   A big part of rebuilding trust requires a deeper awareness of the power dynamics at play. A few questions to ask include: What can or cannot actually be done differently within the existing decision-making process? What does one representative from one department or agency actually have influence over, given their position in the system? What are the common implicit transactions across stakeholder relationships that influence decision making processes? What role does the Alderman play?

4. **Foster Collective Learning**
   We must adopt a learning mindset. When it comes to engaging residents across a community, there is no single right way to do it (although there are plenty of wrong ways). Every community context is different and changes over time. If we collectively approach the process of community engagement with the goal of continually doing it better, we will seek and try new things, as well as incorporate lessons from past strategies. We don't need all the answers, just the willingness to improve over time.

   Evaluation typically comes at the end of the process, if at all. However, to better ensure we are being responsive to the particular community contexts we find ourselves in, we should garner feedback, reflect, and iterate along the way.

5. **Time Horizon**
   Community engagement, especially if you are committed to involving hard-to-reach populations, takes time. It is important to be generous—time-wise—with participants and give them adequate time to receive, integrate, reflect, and respond to information. The time horizon is even longer when engaging communities that have been disappointed by past engagement efforts, because you must start by healing and rebuilding trust. Additionally, the people we are engaging are often providing input and feedback for free when we are not. That means we should be highly cautious of the time commitment we request. By being transparent with time in general (project time, planning time, individual time) at the beginning, we can better set expectations for both sides. It sets a tone of honesty which conceives trust. This is time and resource intensive work, that can no longer be short changed.

6. **Action-Oriented**
   We should always clearly communicate the tangible objective(s) we are expecting at the end of the process and avoid "talking for the sake of talking." Even if the planning and design process may be long, find ways to generate tangible outcomes—be that pop-up markets or temporary displays—to demonstrate progress and momentum towards the larger outcome.

Case Study

To inform ON TO 2050, the long-range regional plan for metro Chicago, **Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning** (CMAP) led a 3-year, multi-faceted resident engagement effort that garnered input from over 100,000 residents across the seven-county region. Residents participated in workshops, open houses, topical forums, interactive kiosks, online surveys, and social media to contribute their ideas for the region's future. CMAP's extensive public engagement activities produced voluminous comments, data points, and insights, which have guided the plan's development.

PRINCIPLE 2

Co-Design Community Engagement With Community

Community engagement is most meaningful and effective when the process is designed with community partners.

1. Name Power Dynamics
2. Communicate Appropriately
3. Offer Different Formats

"Research who the 'influencers' are in each respective community. Make sure they're at the table early as they can galvanize allies or kindle opponents."

— Kelwin Harris, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning

2 Co-Design Community Engagement With Community

Community engagement is most meaningful and effective when the process is designed with community partners.

By shaping what it looks like together, we can get closer to a context- and community-specific process inclusive of diverse perspectives. Co-design also allows the opportunity to speak openly about and agree on guiding principles and ground rules to shape the process. And it enables us to be proactive rather than reactive.

This is admittedly a big lift, but it can be done in a more meaningful and manageable way by forming an initial representative steering committee or leadership group of community members to help shape the engagement plan (remember the network nodes).

When co-designing the broader community engagement process with community partners, consider the following factors.

1. **Name Power Dynamics**
   Discuss and challenge the ways in which power is often exercised. Chicago has a long history of displacing people of color via top-down planning that has shaped our city and communities, since the City's birth to the 1909 Burnham Plan and the ramifications of redlining that play out even to this day.

> "Begin your work by acknowledging and confronting the unavoidable power dynamics at play. This acknowledgement should include challenging your lens or the lens with which your team approaches the work (disrupting notions of saviorism, questioning preconceived ideas about and biases toward members of priority communities). Understand how your own social status will be perceived by those you seek to serve. Understand the ways your institutions may have historically treated those you serve and how community members may see you as a result."
>
> —Jaylan Abd Elrahman & Jay Feldman, Living Cities

2. **Communicate Appropriately**
   Use terms that are inclusive and appropriate for the people we are trying to reach, and avoid exclusive, obscure, or jargony language.

3. **Offer Different Formats**
   Select from a menu of participation platforms or formats that can accommodate different learning and exchange styles. (Remember, not everyone feels comfortable participating even though they

have access to the decision-making table.) A menu of participation formats should include in person and virtual options, as well as both analog tools and digital technologies for reaching out and communicating with different resident groups. Experiment with placemaking and pop-up activities to test and iterate new ways of engagement with community partners. Also, respect those who just want to express an opinion and leave, but establish clear paths for those that want to learn more and engage. Consider how to make handouts, agendas, and materials easy to access in a variety of ways.

Tool

Telephone Town Hall Meeting is a platform that enables a telephone-based webinar to reach populations that might not otherwise be able to contribute in person or have digital access. Questions and comments are moderated by the service's screening and data collection staff to ensure everyone is able to contribute in a streamlined way.

Try...

Taking a page out of Detroit Collaborative Design Center's playbook by asking folks to bring music clips to describe how they want to feel when experiencing the new place, project, or program.

Case Study

The Detroit Works Project / Detroit Future City Plan's robust community engagement was guided by three core principles:

1. Incorporating community leadership in engagement decision making;
2. Providing transparent information exchange, including valuing and integrating community knowledge; and
3. Using communications as a core part of engagement efforts.

To reach its engagement goals, a group of **Process Leaders** was formed and selected for their expertise in civic engagement among different constituencies and geographic areas in Detroit. They advised the civic engagement process toward blending community and technical expertise. The Process Leaders helped establish a framework for this blended approach and initiated working groups with partners to guide and implement particular engagement activities.

Notes & Ideas

PRINCIPLE 3

Enable Two-Way Communication and Learning

A fundamental goal of community engagement efforts should be to establish trusted, transparent two-way channels of communication and learning.

1. Show Up
2. Then Listen
3. Be Explicit About Intentions
4. Be Clear About Expectations

> **"We recognize that government has not always been a force for good in people's lives, especially when it comes to communities of color. We have to earn the trust of our community partners, which means coming to the table with humility, a commitment to hear and work hard to address concerns, and the sincere belief that we share a common goal: a city where all residents have the resources and opportunities they need to thrive."**
>
> **— Megan Cunningham, Chicago Department of Public Health**

3 Enable Two-Way Communication and Learning

A fundamental goal of community engagement efforts should be to establish trusted, transparent two-way channels of communication and learning.

Having an ongoing dialogue with communities makes engagement around a particular project or plan easier because we already have a trusted relationship established. At the very least, an exchange of information, opportunities, and interests should go both ways.

1. **Show Up**
   The first step in rebuilding trust is to show up, even when you don't have an agenda. Attend as many events as you can, find ways to more deeply understand and support the community's priorities.

2. **Then Listen**
   We must strive to more actively and deeply listen. Take the time to cast aside assumptions and more deeply understand each other's contexts, strengths, constraints, perspective, motivations, and aspirations. Listening should be more about informing the vision rather than just requesting input on a plan. What would it look like if we let the development, project, or program inception emerge from conversations with community members about what they value and want to see in their community?

3. **Create Feedback Loops**
   It is disingenuous to invite input without the intention of and a clear plan for using it. You want people to feel like and see that their voice and input matters. It is important to articulate and demonstrate how community input is considered and how it will inflect decision making. A simple place to start is to capture and reflect meeting notes back to participants. Ideally, we must develop and present clear report out mechanisms and show how past input has been incorporated at each step of the process. Finally, we must also challenge ourselves to apply input in ways that generate new options, because this will give residents faith in the process.

4. **Be Clear About Expectations**
   In building stronger communication channels with community members, we must better manage expectations, in terms of:
   - The purpose and goals of the engagement process;
   - What is expected from participants (e.g. the length and frequency of commitment); and
   - What participants can expect from you and the process (e.g. both opportunities and constraints).

Being clear about expectations inherently creates accountability, so be ready to welcome others holding you accountable. Also, be ready to negotiate with community members to find middle ground on what you want, what they are willing to give, and vice versa.

Strategy

Keep conversations around the built environment decision making tangible and rooted in a realistic (market-based) understanding of what is possible.

Case Studies

CNT's RainReady Program was commissioned to write six flood mitigation plans for six municipalities along the Calumet River, directly south of Chicago. RainReady monikered this area the Calumet Corridor. Unlike the many plans written for this area before, RainReady promised to provide a set of plans based on resident verified data. The Calumet Corridor plans would feature community voice and guidance. To this end, RainReady hired a full-time staff person dedicated to listening to, and in some instances interpreting, residents' sentiments. With a photographer in tow, and a stack of surveys in hand, RainReady deeply listened to over 2,100 people in less than a year. Through capturing resident input, RainReady was able to change the direction of solutions, prioritize problems based on resident needs, obtain complete buy-in from both residents and municipal leadership, and gain a deeper understanding of the path forward for the Calumet Corridor.

The Chicago Area HIV Integrated Services Council (CAHISC)—a membership body comprised of over 45 community members representing HIV services providers, advocates, and HIV services consumers—collaborates with the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) to develop annual services priority setting and resources allocation of its HIV Prevention, HIV Housing, and HIV Care services.

"You want people to feel like their voice does matter. You want people to have faith in the processes. You want people to buy in to what is happening. It doesn't mean they have to agree with everything that is going on, but I think people should at least know how you got from point A to point B."

— Wendell Joseph, Neighborhood Planner, City of Cambridge

Notes & Ideas

PRINCIPLE 4

Promote Cultural Competency and Empathy

We must get to know the contexts—community values and norms—in which we are working, really well.

1. Meet People Where They Are...
2. ...and Be Aware of Where YOU Are
3. R-E-S-P-E-C-T

"There are a lot of talented people in our community, and the key to tapping into that talent is providing real opportunities to succeed. It has to be a two-way relationship; organizations need to be able to meet people where they are, provide authentic opportunities, and then act as a real partner in coming to solutions and bringing ideas to life."

— Luis Gutierrez, Latinos Progresando

4 Promote Cultural Competency and Empathy

We must get to know the contexts—community values and norms—in which we are working, really well.

1. **Meet People Where They Are...**
   We hear this a lot. The most basic interpretation is to literally meet community members where they may already be convened, versus having them make an extra effort to come to a separate event. Plan engagement activities that can be part of existing meetings or events organized by others. Always be scouting for opportunities to collaborate and overlap with community partners.

   To take this concept one step further, it is important to meet them where they are at emotionally, too. Through honest conversations with your community partners, try to get a sense of where folks might be at in terms of frustrations or pain points. It is important to understand the context and history of our relationship to specific communities and design the engagement process with the goal of healing those relationships. This requires us to bring humility and vulnerability and to be willing be accountable for our own wrongs, as well those of our peers and colleagues.

2. **...and be aware of where YOU are**
   Be aware of what energy and emotion you are bringing to the space, as well.

3. **R-E-S-P-E-C-T**
   Being respectful is fundamental to meaningful engagement. Respect is not just about treating people the way you would want to be treated. It is about treating them the way *they* want to be treated, and knowing the difference. In addition to being thoughtful and consistent, we should use contextually and culturally-appropriate communication tools and forms of expression.

   Translation is an obvious *must* when working in communities that have English as a second language. But let us consider a variety of communication channels, from flyers to Facebook. If we don't know what is best or preferred, then we need to ask. (Again, we are bringing a learning mindset.)

   Beyond language, values also need translating. We must recognize that some values we deem universal are not, in fact. Different cultures value different things. For instance, fences around an open space: to you they may seem restrictive, but to some community members concerned with safety they are non-negotiable.

Try...

Thinking about what it would look like to plan for and create more public spaces for intentional venting. As we know, residents often need a space to being heard and use community meetings to do so. What if we gave them dedicated time and space for this, versus trying to avoid or manage it? Frustration forums? And remember listen deeply and find ways to help!

Try...

Proposing ground rules for the discussion at the top of your meeting and allow folks to add or modify them to better reflect the context. Elevated Chicago's co-created Ground Rules, for example:

- We are aware of our power and our privilege
- We embrace different communication styles, esp. the ones farther apart from ours
- We are mindful of speaking time to avoid a few people dominating the meeting
- We listen with an open mind
- We give and receive feedback, criticism and questioning
- We seek multiple points of view
- We check for diversity gaps (who is missing) and propose solutions for it
- We actively pursue engagement of less vocal members
- We assume good faith

Try...

Conducting the Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory. A critical difficulty we face in our organizations and communities is that communication misunderstandings, conflicts, and problems across cultures are often grounded in very different approaches people take for resolving difficulties with one another. The Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory helps individuals increase their understanding of their own communication and conflict resolution approach; employ more culturally responsive strategies in communicating ideas and resolving conflict; and more accurately interpret the statements and actions of others.

Notes & Ideas

PRINCIPLE 5

Value Community Knowledge and Capital

Community residents are, hands down, the experts on their community context and built environment. We must not only acknowledge local expertise, but compensate and amplify it.

1. Seek Local Knowledge
2. Compensate
3. Redefine & Amplify Capital
4. Recruit & Procure Locally

"Ownership is where you begin to feel like you are now a part of something. You are now shaping your own destiny and helping to rebuild your community."

— Kevin Sutton, Foundation for Homan Square

5 Value Community Knowledge and Capital

Community residents are, hands down, the experts on their community context and built environment. We must not only acknowledge local expertise, but compensate and amplify it.

1. **Seek Local Knowledge**
   Recognize that there is a long history of neighborhood planning across Chicago. Our effort must acknowledge prior plans vetted by the community and demonstrate how we intend to honor and integrate them moving forward. One important way to do this is to seek out community partners that can help uphold and reflect this planning history, as well as amplify wisdom of the current context.

2. **Compensate**
   Compensation is important anytime we rely on others for time, expertise, or connections. Explore mechanisms and resources (in-kind or financial) to compensate for community participation to ensure your partners are and feel valued.

3. **Redefine & Amplify Capital**
   Capital comes in many forms. We, all too often, overlook or take for granted the many forms of community capital that can contribute to a planning process. It is important to reflect on the various forms of capital that can be leveraged and seek them locally.
   - *Financial:* access to monetary assets
   - *Political:* influence over policy
   - *Social:* access to networks, communities, or general public
   - *Cultural:* influence over values
   - *Knowledge:* access to data, research, information, or lived experience
   - *Natural:* control over land and water resources
   - *Built:* control over infrastructure

4. **Recruit & Procure Locally**
   Prioritize the recruitment of community residents for facilitation, as well as for any jobs or activities created through capital and program investments, including roles like architects, planners, designers, and builders, property managers, security, owners, and stewards. Ensure that contracts associated with community engagement efforts, as well as project or program-related contracts, include a significant representation of community-based small businesses and entrepreneurs, including venues and food for meetings, and goods and services for planning, development, and management of facilities.

Strategies

- Work with community partners to create a shared database for local hiring, recruiting, and/or training. And invest in community readiness for when resources and opportunities are available.

- Work with developers to establish community benefits agreements—where, in exchange for various public subsidies, they promise to provide tangible benefits to the neighboring community, such as a specific number of permanent jobs and affordable housing units.

- Require in all RFPs demonstrated commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), including language and scoring guidelines that go beyond "checking the box" and require track record and quantitative and qualitative metrics of DEI in the company's leadership and staff, human resources practices, procurement, community partnerships, social responsibility, and investment strategies.

Case Studies

West Side United, Chicago—a cross-sector collaborative dedicated to making their neighborhoods stronger, healthier, and more vibrant places to live—is convening community advisory boards to guide their impact initiatives.

MAPSCorps—a non-profit based on Chicago's South Side—trains high school students in the scientific method and mobile technology to become community data scientists and produce high quality data about community assets, particularly lower income communities. This annual census captures every public-facing business and organization in a community and is used by doctors, nurses, social workers, community planners, teachers, governments, and residents to promote health and economic vitality. By partnering with local youth employment agencies and community-based organizations, MAPSCorps is investing and building in community knowledge and capital.

Corridor Development Initiative (CDI): The Metropolitan Planning Council—a Chicago-based independent, non-profit dedicated to shaping a more equitable, sustainable and prosperous greater Chicago region—has developed CDI as a participatory planning process so that transit-oriented development can better reflect the shared values and desires of a community. CDI is a three-part process that:

- Provides clear structure and expectations for the engagement process;
- Allows communities to proactively plan for real world development scenarios;
- Helps residents understand issues such as density, affordable housing, and the true cost of development; and
- Generates a set of priorities to guide community leaders as they plan for future development in their neighborhoods.

Meeting 1: Existing conditions and goals

The first meeting provides an overview of current land use policies and demographic and commercial changes in the community, giving residents a chance to discuss (re)development opportunities and challenges and set concrete goals.

Meeting 2: Block exercise

At the second meeting, community members explore economic and design options for their community through a hands-on block exercise. Residents create hypothetical development options for three sites using various wooden blocks that represent retail and housing units. As community members build their proposals, they are sketched by design advisors, while a real estate advisor calculates development costs and revenues.

Meeting 3: Development recommendations

The final meeting features a panel of real estate experts and/or developers who respond to the outcomes of the block exercise in light of current market trends. These recommendations are then compiled into a report that community leaders can present to potential developers to provide them with a community-led vision. Community decisions are then codified into request for proposals and other project documents.

Burten, Bell, Carr Development Inc. (BBC) is a community development corporation dedicated to empowering residents and revitalizing blighted and underserved communities in Cleveland's Central and Kinsman neighborhoods. One of BBC's guiding principles is "citizen leadership," which it upholds by investing in the development of citizen leaders to sustain revitalization efforts and empower engagement and participation of all community stakeholders. In practice this looks like convening paid community advisory committees, to compensate well-connected community members for their time and insights in engaging their neighbors in local planning and development efforts.

PRINCIPLE 6

Seek and Embrace Multiple Viewpoints

Seek out and engage people who are or will be most affected by development decisions.

1. Define Diversity & Welcome It
2. Reach Out to the “Unusual” Suspects
3. Avoid “Group Think”
4. Embrace Creative Tension

"I have also found that quietly inviting a tight-lipped participant to speak rather than having the whole table stare at them through the invitation works. While a dominant person is offering their 7th comment, make a note of who has stayed quiet, perhaps because they knew they only offered conflict. I tell them conflict is welcome and necessary for change. When the floodgates open, I stand back."

— Local Community Engagement Practitioner

6 Seek and Embrace Multiple Viewpoints

Seek out and engage people who are or will be most affected by development decisions.

1. **Define Diversity & Welcome It**
   We need to create spaces that are welcoming to as many viewpoints as possible. Diversity in the room is *always* an asset, even when there are clearly opposing views. We can mitigate unproductive conflict by collectively establishing ground rules at the top of each discussion to set inclusive norms and demonstrating them in our own actions. This is key to alleviating participant anxiety and foster a dynamic, generative, constructive discourse. We should also consider engaging professionally trained mediators or conflict management experts to assist in heated arguments and difficult conversations. Avoiding conflict is no longer an option, progress depends on us facing and working through it to find common ground. Reach out for the help of professionals whenever possible.

   Ensuring accessibility for residents living with disabilities to fully participate in engagement activities is essential. Other important strategies for creating a welcoming environment include offering culturally appropriate food, child care, and translation services. Make sign-in sheets optional and always ask permission before taking photos.

   Beyond these oft-cited strategies, consider asking your stakeholders why they might *not* show up to participate in an engagement process. Practitioners at Groundwork USA have found these commonly cited reasons hindering community participation:

   - Lack of knowledge of the political system
   - Previous negative community engagement experience
   - Historical patterns of municipal decisions not reflecting community input, broken promises made by political candidates, or both, resulting in reinforced distrust of government and institutions
   - Economic barriers; needing to focus on basic needs of self and family
   - Not seeing one's own culture or identity reflected in meeting format or content
   - Fear of being judged, unsafe, or unwelcome
   - Transportation barriers
   - Childcare needs
   - Spiritual beliefs and practices
   - Immigration status
   - Meeting time or date does not consider work schedules, religious holidays, meal times, or other family needs

With these reasons in mind, we can take a more human-centered approach to designing engagement processes, and remember to invite community partners in to help you shape it.

2. **Reach Out to the "Unusual" Suspects**
   Design engagement and learning opportunities to reach out to more than the "usual" suspects, or those that are easiest to consult. Diversify target audiences by engaging marginalized individuals and groups, including youth, elders, people who have English as a second language, and those living with a disability. We should do our best to ensure that participant integration and representation is balanced (race, gender, age, experience, resources). Recognize that there may be power dynamics in the neighborhood or other invisible barriers to participation that you must navigate to ensure more inclusive engagement.

3. **Avoid "Group Think"**
   Even if we have done our best to create a welcoming, inclusive environment, there still is the possibility for certain voices or viewpoints to dominate the discussion. Thus, we may consider employing multiple information and insight gathering methods to capture unique viewpoints.

4. **Embrace Creative Tension**
   When practicing inclusive facilitation to ensure all voices are heard, we may often see conflict emerge. As facilitators of the discussion, we must strive to be more comfortable (and even trained in) moving conflict to a place of convergence and productively work through the "heat." By not shying away from conflict, we can use it to better understand each other's viewpoints and find common ground. Creative tension can be a productive and constructive tool to arrive at more holistic decisions, but requires a greater tolerance for conflict. It is less about "resolving" conflict, and more about transforming it into a productive space to dig deeper into what underpins opinions. This requires knowing when to listen and when to step in.

Try...

Taking a page out of LUCHA's play book and provide notecards or post-it notes and pens to allow participants to weigh in in writing. While this strategy requires capacity to collect and synthesize written comments, it is worth the extra effort to hear from those who might choose not to participate verbally.

Try...

Taking a page out of Detroit Collaborative Design Center's play book and ask people to brainstorm using *verbs* instead of *nouns* to describe their desires. This will allow for more creative solutions to emerge. For example, use words like "ascending" "descending" instead of "stairs."

Strategies

- Seek feedback on how you are doing with regards to your inclusive goals. Administer a short, written survey of participants at the end of your engagement activities, asking questions like these from Community Allies' Radical Inclusion Framework:

    - I felt welcome and comfortable giving my opinion:
      Yes | Often | Sometimes | Rarely | Never
    - The location and time were convenient for me:
      Yes | Often | Sometimes | Rarely | Never
    - I understood the issues being discussed:
      Yes | Often | Sometimes | Rarely | Never
    - The event was a good use of my time:
      Yes | Often | Sometimes | Rarely | Never

- Adaptive Leadership is the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive. Aligning stakeholders with diverse perspectives towards a shared purpose often requires navigating through uncertainty and ambiguity, collectively learning as you go, and ultimately taking individuals on a journey of change. The adaptive leadership framework gives leaders—in all senses of the word—the critical tools to manage change and transform conflict into productive outcomes towards a common goal.

Case Study

Originally designed for the 2010-2014 Detroit Works Project / Detroit Future City Plan, the **Roaming Table** is a physical, folding table meant to "disrupt people's everyday lives," according to Theresa Skora, who helped design it. The Roaming Table popped up across Detroit, outside of banks, churches and community centers, to catch over 5,000 residents in their daily activities and engage them in a conversation about the future of their city. The Roaming Table collected surveys, distributed literature, and presented a creative, unexpected way to catalyze conversations with community members.

PRINCIPLE 7

Cultivate Leadership and Advocacy

From inception and design to implementation and activation, we can use the built environment decision-making process to cultivate and empower community leaders to lead future efforts.

1. Build Up Agency
2. Do No Harm
3. Improve Collaborative Capacity

"The role of Logan Square Neighborhood Association is to ensure the people most impacted have a place at decision-making tables, especially when it relates to community development. Too often residents are told to be quiet and listen to the experts but we challenge ourselves every day to value the expertise of lived experience. The voices of those most vulnerable should not only be included, but validated and heard—only this way can we achieve equity."

— Christian Diaz, Logan Square Neighborhood Association

7 Cultivate Leadership and Advocacy

From inception and design to implementation and activation, we can use the built environment decision-making process to cultivate and empower community leaders to lead future efforts.

1. **Build Up Agency**
   From the start, strengthen community members' comfort and knowledge to more deeply engage throughout the process. Kick things off by reviewing the project phases and defining key terms and jargon. Along the way, provide participants with the information they need to participate in a more meaningful way. For instance, take time to unpack data and analyses that influence decision making, cover project finances, introduce key stakeholders, and openly discuss any broader dynamics at play that influence the final outcome. Check-in regularly with community members to see if they are feeling more equipped to engage in planning and design, and pivot the strategy when needed.

   We can support existing community leaders as well as identify emerging ones through our community engagement process. Use engagement opportunities as a chance to build relationships with emerging community leaders who may not be on our radar yet. While they might not have the social capital that long-standing community partners have, they will one day soon. It is always important to keep our eyes out for new voices and perspectives. Finally, at every opportunity, find a way to properly acknowledge and reward local leaders who have helped facilitate the process in an open and inclusive way.

2. **Do No Harm**
   Any intervention has intended and unintended consequences. The "do no harm" approach, adopted from the medical practice, acknowledges that sometimes doing something is more harmful than doing nothing at all. Community engagement has the potential for unintended consequences ranging from disrupting local economies to perpetuating power imbalance. By bringing a "do no harm" approach, we are committing to examine the dynamics that can lead to negative impacts and unintended consequences; as well as, to make difficult tradeoffs between diverse goals to reduce harm.

3. **Improve Collaborative Capacity**
   Provide strategic opportunities for building community leaders' capacity to collaborate within and across communities and decision makers. Inherent in this work is social complexity—or the diversity of and relationships between stakeholders with diverse perspectives and understandings, due to experience, education, professional focus, or position within the system. Navigating this complexity is challenging and requires collaborative and facilitative skills.

   Remember, in deconstructing the monolithic idea of "the community," it is important to keep in mind that while community members are experts on their own context, there are likely aspects of their community that they are unaware of without listening to the perspective and context of their fellow neighbor. Good engagement spaces enable community members to learn from one another.

   Seek out opportunities to invest in communities' capacity to not only participate but collaborate in built environment decision making. Consider asking community partners if there are specific skills and/or expertise that they see as missing in their networks, and invest in trainings to build their collaborative capacity—whether it is community organizing, coalition building, technical knowledge, facilitation, or consensus building. Focus on building collaborative capacity at all scales, from block clubs and schools to chambers of commerce and tenant associations. Our goal should be to strengthen the community's collective capacity to advocate for its needs and shape its future.

Try...

Finding fun, positive ways to celebrate community champions. An award ceremony, perhaps? Take a page out of RainReady's playbook and host a launch party for plans that are released to honor the community leaders and partners who made the process a success.

Strategy

Accept turnover on both sides of the engagement as inevitable. Plan for it by establishing clear onboarding processes and documentation of past discussions, identifying proxies and subs, and recapping before each meeting what has happened so far.

Case Studies

Motivated by the vision of "a city government of all people, by all people, and for all people," the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods created a civic leadership development program—the **People's Academy for Community Engagement**. Designed for residents interested in acquiring skills to be more effective in community building and engagement efforts, this program trains 25-30 people at a time to:

- Refine their organizing and communication skills.
- Increase the effectiveness of community groups they work with.
- Identify resources and avenues to empower communities and neighborhoods.
- Cultivate a deeper appreciation of cultural competency and inclusive civic engagement.
- Learn from key community and civic leaders and build new relationships.

East LA Community Corporation (ELACC) is a community development corporation based in East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights focused on developing affordable housing and neighborhood assets while empowering community members with economic opportunity and leadership skills. ELACC's Leadership Academy offers 7 week-long trainings to build up grassroots leaders to identify and lead neighborhood-based and city-wide advocacy campaigns. The leadership academy curriculum covers introductory and advanced organizing training, introduction to systems of oppression (capitalism, heterosexism, patriarchy, and white supremacy), history of land and housing under capitalism, and history of social movements. Understanding that the leadership needed already exists in the community, the goals of the academy are to:

- Develop community members' organizational commitment and feelings of ownership while increasing their practical and political skills.
- Develop political consciousness (anti-racist, anti-patriarchal, and anti-capitalist) and organizing (door knocking, outreach, and public speaking) skills within our base.
- Build strong relationships to transform ourselves as we strive to change the world.
- Build leadership of those most impacted by the housing crisis.

> **"We held a celebration of a past planning process, and invited community members of our current process to attend. Many did and got encouragement to move forward in their own planning process. Champions inspire would-be-champions."**
>
> **— Local Community Engagement Practitioner**

PRINCIPLE 8

Foster Ownership and Identity in Community

What if community engagement around the built environment fostered ownership and built community wealth?

1. Celebrate Community Identity
2. Demonstrate the Value of Permanent Community Assets, such as Transit
3. Build Ownership

"'Ownership' doesn't always have to mean financial ownership, it is really about being an active and engaged member of your community. This ranges for each individual, but can look like everything from making it a point to buy a cup of coffee or get your haircut in your neighborhood, to serving on the local school council—whether or not you have a child that goes there, to opening and owning a business. Putting your mark on the community by stepping up and playing a role is an important aspect of ownership."

— Ghian Foreman, Emerald South Economic Development Collaborative

8 Foster Ownership and Identity in Community

What if community engagement around the built environment fostered ownership and built community wealth? Using a parable from the Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation: Give a person a fish, and they can eat for a day. Teach a person to fish, and they will eat for a lifetime. Help them buy the pond and stock it, and you will build wealth for future generations.

1. **Celebrate Community Identity**
   Narratives, especially when reinforced through repetition, shape our perceptions of communities; and perceptions, whether consciously or subconsciously, influence outcomes for Chicago's communities. When we amplify and reinforce positive community narratives, we can overcome both perceived and real barriers to change.

   Finding opportunities to reinforce a sense of place can play an important role in building positive narratives. We should think about how our community engagement efforts can contribute to a sense of place; whether it's investing in demonstration projects that have a compelling and creative presence or co-creating community events with community partners that have a distinct identity.

   Narratives are spread through storytelling. Can we better engage our civic journalism and communication organizations to work with residents in crafting and expanding their stories? How might we better integrate local and cultural food in celebrating community identity? Consider engaging designers, artists, chefs, farmers, performers, and creatives to amplify positive stories, flavors, and messages, as a key dimension of the built environment decision-making process.

2. **Demonstrate Value of Permanent Community Assets, such as Transit**
   Building on a strong sense of place, explore ways to integrate technical and creative methods that spark interest in permanent community assets. For example, engage local artists, designers, storytellers, engineers, architects to make transit hubs and their surrounding areas beautiful, interesting, exciting, and meaningful.

3. **Building Ownership**
   Beyond the conceptual sense of the word "ownership," as we have been using up to this point, we should also be building local financial ownership over community assets. If we are really going to see a shift towards a more equitable city and region, we must find opportunities to build up community ownership and wealth in all projects and programs related to the built environment.

Conceptual Ownership Examples	Financial Ownership Examples
Pride in community identity	Home and business ownership
Buy in on decision making process	Community owned assets and land
Active utilization of space by community	Cooperatives and co-ownership models

Starting with the home, help connect residents to home-owning resources and opportunities, from training in financial planning and disciplined investing to home lease-to-purchase options. Think about how you can connect homeowners to existing resources for maintenance and beautification.

Build business ownership by seeking out emerging local entrepreneurs as potential lessees and provide them with multifaceted support to launch their businesses. This might include connecting them with wrap around support from hands-on business planning and development to low-cost rent and capital.

In supporting small businesses, it is important to recognize that decades of disinvestment may have degraded commercial building stock and infrastructure. Connecting entrepreneurs to storefronts is not so straightforward, if the storefronts are not move-in ready. The unexpected costs of renovations can sink a small business. Thus, it is important to consider building support for both the financial awareness about the cost and scope of stabilizing a vacant space and for the renovations themselves.

Case Studies

buildingcommunityWORKSHOP is a Texas based nonprofit community design center seeking to improve the livability and viability of communities through the practice of thoughtful design and making. bcWORKSHOP's Neighborhood Stories project is an effort to strengthen awareness of the city, celebrate the diverse places that give it character and texture, and create a platform for active dialogue about its history and future. Through interviews with community stakeholders, bcWORKSHOP has gotten to know residents through the stories they choose to tell about their communities. This deeper perspective and sense of the community's lens, values, and aspirations has helped them better collaborate with community members. In their words: "The stories people share about where they live—their memories, their concerns, their dreams—show us why place matters."

Vends + Vibes—sponsored by UChicago Arts, Arts + Public Life—is an annual two-day winter marketplace and celebration of unique handmade products made primarily by South Side artists and creative entrepreneurs. Hosted on the historic Garfield Boulevard, the festival brings together over 30 vendors and some of Chicago's most eclectic DJs to create a unique celebration for the arts and culture of the community.

Elevated Chicago Activation Grants were awarded to nonprofit organizations for projects and programs that created awareness, two-way learning opportunities, community participation, and public interest around the Elevated Chicago mission of promoting more equitable, healthy, sustainable, and culturally vibrant communities at and around the prioritized transit stations. These activities fostered new collaborations within communities, and across sites and sectors; activated under-utilized and vacant spaces to bring communities together; and celebrated community culture, history, and pride. Activities included cross-site events and intergenerational meals, tree planting, street festivals and cultural celebrations, musical performances, and art installations.

The Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children (CLOCC) Neighborhood Walkability Initiative—a program of Ann and Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago—trains and supports community-based organizations to assess and address environmental barriers to walking, biking, and use of public transportation. Community members and organizations conduct an audit on streets, sidewalks, and intersections that measure factors such as driver behavior, street and sidewalk conditions, lighting and other visibility features, and community safety. Obstacles are prioritized and short- and long-term strategies to reduce them are planned and implemented. CLOCC connects communities as needed to external partners who can help leverage funding, political will, and other resources needed to reduce or eliminate obstacles. By participating in the Neighborhood Walkability Initiative, residents engage in new ways with their built and social environments, gather data which they own and can use to advance change, learn action planning and advocacy, and build collective efficacy to improve physical activity and health through environmental change.

The Better Buildings, Better Blocks Program, run by Building Community Value in Detroit, aims to equip residents with the practical skills to invest in their neighborhoods and build wealth through real estate. Through a six-week real estate class, residents learn the nuts and bolts of navigating multifamily real estate development and get a space to discuss their dreams of fixing up a storefront in the neighborhood and opening up their own business. Instructors give attendees access to resources needed to navigate the difficulties of Detroit real estate, and participants are encouraged to connect with each other, team up, and learn from each other's' projects.

Market Creek Plaza—by the Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation's (JCNI)—in San Diego, CA is the first commercial real estate development project in the country to be designed, built, and ultimately owned (in the most literal, economic sense) by neighborhood residents. The thoughtful and thorough development process focused on the design of self-generating systems of wealth creation and resident control of assets.

Toward this end, JCNI and a group of community business owners launched a working team to engage in the design and creation of a community ownership strategy. The strategy uses the profits from Market Creek Plaza to balance and accomplish three goals:

1. To build individual wealth within the neighborhood through ownership of the project;
2. To expand community-controlled resources that can be used for public benefit; and
3. To create ongoing development capacity.

The ownership structure was composed of the following organizations:

- Diamond Community Investors will return profits to residents and build individual assets. As part of the investment structure, JCNI created the nation's first community development initial public offering (IPO), which aimed to enable up to 650 community residents to be actual stockholders in the development.
- The community-run Neighborhood Unity Foundation will return profits through neighborhood grants and build community assets.
- The Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation will build development, construction, and outreach capacity in the neighborhood.
- Market Creek Partners LLC, a limited liability corporation, will be the owner of Market Creek Plaza.
- Diamond Management Inc. (DMI) will manage the LLC. Diamond Community Investors will have voting representation on DMI's board, and all community investors will have a voice in major decisions.

"The stories people share about where they live—their memories, their concerns, their dreams—show us why place matters."

— buildingcommunityWORKSHOP

Notes & Ideas

Sources, Best Practices & Case Studies

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Activation event at former Chicago Public School and future Overton Business and Technology Incubator, located in Elevated Chicago's 51st eHub, sponsored by Washington Park Development Group and organized with support from Borderless Studio. (Courtesy of Borderless Studio / Photo: Brandon Fields)

CONNECTING PEOPLE,
BUILDING EQUITY