

Achieving the Benefits of Civic Engagement

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What is Civic Engagement?

- Seeking to learn from the public
 - More than soliciting input or answering questions
 - Happens outside regular municipal meetings
 - A different way of operating to get your job done
- Residents acting as responsible citizens
 - Engaged and accountable for their community

What Civic Engagement is Not

Common misperceptions – it is NOT:

- A way to get citizens to act in a way public officials desire
- Involving more people to have the same discussions
- A meeting where people gather to complain or find fault

Civic Engagement Guiding Principles

1. Transparency and accountability
2. Equity and inclusiveness
3. Effectiveness and efficiency
4. Responsiveness
5. Forum neutrality
6. Consensus-based decision making

Benefits of Civic Engagement

- Faster and easier implementation of public policies
- Successful outcomes for contentious issues
- Greater buy-in for public decisions
- Increased trust between residents and government
- Improved public behavior at municipal meetings
- More actively involved citizens and sense of community

The Progression of Civic Engagement

- If you have already done something, you tell the public about it
- If you are planning to do something, you tell them about it
- If you want to do something, you let them comment on it
- When you have an issue, you let the community weigh in
- You let the community affect the outcome of the process

Promoting Engagement at All Levels

- Starts with the municipal leadership
- Department management
- Municipal boards and committees
- Community engagement
- Communication of implementation and outcomes

Approaches Range from Informing to Empowering

- Information exchange – giving and gathering
- Consultation – feedback and input
- Involvement and engagement
 - developing alternatives
 - choosing priorities
 - providing feedback
- Collaboration and consensus – joint problem-solving

Civic Engagement Process Phases

- Before
 - Assess whether to use a collaborative process
 - Plan and organize the process
- During
 - Conduct and manage the discussions
 - Work to reach agreement
- After
 - Implement the outcome

Steps in the Assessment Phase

- Identify key interest groups
- Develop questions and interview and/or survey
- Identify the key issues and concerns
- Frame the issues and reframe to encourage participation
- Identify shared interests to build on
- Recommend a course of action to the leadership

Key roles: Sponsor

Sponsor responsibilities:

- Government or civic group that initiates process
- Provide support and commit to outcomes follow through
- Conduct an assessment & secure leadership go-ahead
- Engage participants
- Select and work with convener & neutral facilitator
- Plan and organized process & ensure sufficient resources
- May work with participants to find solutions
- Implement the agreement

Key Roles: Convener

Convener:

- Elected or appointed official or respected civic leader
- Power to bring diverse people together for common issue

You may need a Convener as well as a Sponsor

- Especially helpful for multi-town & regional initiatives
- Can get everyone to the table & help them stay there
- Authority based on their office, not the person
- Effectiveness due to neutrality and leadership credibility

Key Roles: Neutral Forum

Neutral forum or facilitator:

- Helpful when history of mistrust, high level of contention
- Reputation for impartiality, ability to create “neutral space”
- Credibility to assure participants of unbiased process
- Expertise to assess and frame issues
- Ability to conduct process, establish implementation steps

Considerations for Multi-town or Regional Issues

- Need good leaders in each municipality committed to working together across boundaries throughout the process
- Need to build good civic engagement skills in each town before you can successfully work together on multi-town issues
- Need to build trust with a successful track record on easier issues first

Handling Disruptions

Different types of disruption

- Concern about process
 - Transparency or inclusiveness
- Content issues
 - Missing data or need for technical experts
- Planned disruptions
 - Is it free speech or crossing a line?

Strategies for Handling Disruptions

- Change the Agenda
- Temporarily adjourn and relocate
- Cancel or reschedule forum
- Schedule additional forums and/or surveys
- Provide additional clarifying information
- Meet with individuals/groups outside forum
- Disrupter joins forum
- Disrupter leaves forum
- Call to law enforcement

QUESTIONS?

MOPC Municipal Dialogue Projects

Town of Hardwick – Participatory Budgeting and
Capital Planning

Town of Grafton – Provision of Library Services

Town of Orange – Budgeting Public Hearing

Town of Falmouth – Alternative Dispute Resolution
Training

MOPC Multi-Town Dialogue Projects

Towns of Eastham & Wellfleet – Police Regionalization

Towns of Provincetown, Truro, Wellfleet, Eastham,
Orleans, Chatham, Harwich & Brewster – Lower/
Outer Cape Schools Summit

Towns of Chatham & Harwich – School Regionalization

MOPC Municipal Dispute Projects

Town of Provincetown – Role of Policing Services

Town of Truro – Town Hall Planning

Town of Tisbury – Wastewater Planning

MOPC Multi-Town Dispute Projects

Towns of Dennis & Yarmouth – Regional School District

Towns of Alford, Egremont, Monterey, Sheffield and New Marlborough – Regional School District

Cities of Boston & Cambridge and others – Central Artery Charles River Crossing Mediation

PARTNER SHARING EXERCISE

20-Minute Partner Sharing Exercise

Your two municipalities are eligible for a large grant to support the sharing of EMT and ambulance services. The grant would cover any new capital costs and equipment as well as all of the transition costs for the first year.

The state just released a study that shows that there would be substantial 5-year savings for your municipality and other municipalities that are eligible to participate in a regional service for you area. However, these savings can only be achieved if at least three towns join the new service.

Partner Sharing Questions

First, each of you should separately determine what steps you would need to take to engage town officials and citizens in your own town so as to build support for this regional service. Share your steps with your partner.

Then, discuss the steps that you would need to take together to engage your two municipalities so as to build support for this joint initiative.

Finally, what steps would you both need to take to work with officials from other municipalities that are eligible to participate in this regional service so that you can ensure that at least three towns will be willing to pursue this grant?

DISCUSSION