Community Voices for Health

Engagement Skills for Organizers

There are a number of key skills that may be helpful to organizers of "Pennsylvania Voices for Health" and other efforts to engage citizens across a state. This guide will describe skills for:

1. Building coalitions and networks;
2. Recruiting participants;
3. Communicating about engagement;
4. Providing information and options;
5. Managing discussions;
6. Helping participants generate ideas;
7. Helping participants make group decisions; and
8. Supporting action efforts.

BUILDING COALITIONS AND NETWORKS

Coalition Building. Whether it occurs as part of a short-term initiative or a long-term plan, public engagement should be championed, convened, and supported by a diverse coalition of groups and organizations. There are several basic steps in building a coalition:

- ***Identify diverse groups.*** Coalitions are better when they are diverse, in part because coalition members can be critical for recruiting participants. Organizers should think broadly about different kinds of diversity, including racial and ethnic backgrounds, age, education, income, religion, political affiliation, occupation, and neighborhood. It is also important to include people and groups that historically have been left out of decision-making and public life. Reaching out to leaders, organizations, and networks in those populations can be helpful in that task. As organizers begin talking with potential coalition members, they should continually ask: "Who is not yet at the table that ought to be in invited?"
- ***Identify roles coalition members might play.*** Coalition members will have different strengths and may be involved in different ways. Almost all of them can be key allies in the recruitment process, but they also may take on other responsibilities that are suited to their strengths. If organizers think through these roles, it will help sharpen appeals to potential coalition members and help identify gaps that should be filled.
- ***Talk about goals.*** Personal invitations are the most effective ways to recruit coalition members. Organizers should have a simple pitch explaining why a potential

coalition member should become involved and what they might be asked to do. A good pitch describes the engagement initiative or structure and what it is intended to accomplish – and it starts a conversation in which the person hearing the pitch can react and begin to explain their own goals.

- ***Bring coalition members together.*** Organizers should consider hosting a coalition-building meeting to make a pitch to a large number of potential members. This meeting can include a short presentation that provides an overview of what is being planned and concludes with an invitation for attendees to offer comments, suggestions, and commitments.
- ***Allow people to 'sample' productive engagement.*** In coalition-building meetings and other settings, organizers should give people a chance to sample the sort of engagement they want to organize, for example, a sample dialogue on the issue that citizens will address, or a run-through of the online process that will be featured. Because many people have had bad experiences with conventional engagement, it is important for them to experience a more productive approach.

Finding or Building Online Networks. Online networks are versatile tools with many different uses in public engagement. An online network can help coalition members work together, sustain engagement, and provide a long-term structure for collaboration, communication, and community-building. An online network can be geographically based, or it can center on a shared issue or concern.

Before building a new online network, organizers should find out what kinds of online networks already exist. This is especially important if the goal is to strengthen engagement infrastructure at the neighborhood level. Steven Clift (2014) of e-democracy.org suggests:

> Some neighborhoods have thriving YahooGroups from a decade ago, or a local "place blog" with an active web forum – *join forces* with them rather than recreating the wheel. Do a careful search as these can be very hard to find beyond back fence word of mouth. Troll Yahoo groups by geography or search Yahoo groups generally, search Google Groups or browse into a Google Groups region and then use "Filter" to search, use Advanced Google search narrowing results to "site or domain: facebook.com" to find Facebook Groups and Pages, and use Google to search for local place names combined with terms like "web forum, listserv, email list, mailing list, online group, blog, Facebook Page, etc."

Other kinds of geographically-based online networks include local forums set up by e-democracy.org, Front Porch Forum, NextDoor, EveryBlock, OurCommonPlace, and NeighborLand (Bowman 2015; Horose 2014). There are trade-offs with each of these platforms. Facebook groups are good for gathering and informing people quickly, but awkward for long-term communication because of the way posts are sequenced, because some public officials may be blocked from participating by open meetings laws, and because older residents may not be Facebook users (Clift 2014). Email lists with web access, such as YahooGroups and

GoogleGroups, can reach larger numbers of people, but vary in how easy it is to add new users to the group. Twitter hashtags are useful for spontaneous communication, but may not build the same feeling of membership in the network. In general, online networks will struggle if the technology is hard to use, or if there are outstanding issues or conflicts that keep people from wanting to interact.

To extend existing networks, or build new ones, the first step is simply gathering contact information – including email addresses, social media profiles, and cell phone numbers. A list of 100 participants is usually sufficient for making an online network viable and self-sustaining.

Size, however, is not the only critical consideration in building and sustaining online networks. Organizers setting up new forums also face questions about how to moderate the discussion, set the boundaries of the group, develop ground rules for behavior, and clarify roles and expectations. In most cases, networks will be more effective if participants are encouraged or required to use their real names rather than usernames or aliases they have invented.

Finally, organizers who want to set up or sustain an online network need to feed it with content that people care about. "If you are going to be that local e-leader, the most important thing to do once you choose your tool is to organize and facilitate people toward sharing questions, information, and news" (Clift 2014).

Cultural Competence. To work with a diverse array of coalition members, citizens, or other stakeholders, organizers need to cultivate the skills of cultural competence. Cultural competence can be defined as the "the integration and transformation of knowledge about individuals and groups of people into specific standards, policies, practices, and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings … thereby producing better outcomes" (King, Sims, and Osher 2002).

Most trainings and workshops in cultural competence ask people to reflect on their own backgrounds and experiences, and hear more about the backgrounds and experiences of others (Shapiro 2002). These interactions are structured to build awareness and knowledge of cultures and their differences. In some cases, these trainings delve into questions of bias, discrimination, and aspects of racism, including white privilege, structural racism, and internalized oppression.

These experiences provide safe spaces for people to ask questions and air concerns. "A strength of this approach," write Maggie Potapchuk and her colleagues (2008: 15), "is greater understanding about culture, self-awareness about one's own culture (especially helpful for those in the dominant culture, who can become oblivious to its existence), and skills that promote listening and learning from others."

Organizers can use the questions in Box 1, which were developed by Everyday Democracy, to apply some of the skills and thinking of cultural competence.

Box 1: Cultural Competence Questions for Organizers

Who are we?

Does our group represent all sectors of our community?

Who's missing?

What efforts have we made to include all racial groups?

How well does the leadership in our group reflect our community?

How do we interact/communicate?

How do group members interact?

Describe the racial dynamics in the group. Are we honest about how things are going?

How comfortable are we discussing our own issues of race with one another?

How effective are we at working equitably across racial groups and other differences?

Do we need to set aside time for team building and deeper exploration of the issues?

Are we all participating fully, or are we holding back and letting others represent our interests/views?

How are we functioning and making decisions?

How are meetings run? Who decides?

How do we decide who will lead the group?

What are the implications when white people take the lead?

What dynamics are at play when people of color provide leadership?

When we plan our meetings, what consideration do we give to racial and cultural differences (location, flexible scheduling, social time/food, time)?

Whose voices are heard when we make decisions? (Do our leaders make room for all views?)

Where do we fall short?

How could we improve?

Working with Young People. In both coalition-building and recruitment, organizers should think explicitly about youth involvement. Engaging young people can galvanize all kinds of public engagement efforts.

There is a tendency for organizers to reach out to a small set of young people – the top scholars, student government leaders, and top athletes – who always get invited to take on leadership positions. But all kinds of students, including those not already in traditional youth leadership roles, may show an interest in civic engagement (CIRCLE 2012). To attract a more diverse array of young people, organizers should tap into a variety of youth networks.

There are several considerations organizers should keep in mind when working with young people:

- ***Young people can be leaders of today, not just leaders of the future.*** Some of the most successful public engagement initiatives have had high school or college students as high-profile leaders (Leighninger and Levine 2008). Young people should be given opportunities to help develop the agenda (what kinds of issues do we want to work on?), help set the goals (how will we know if we are making progress?), and help find the information, resources, and allies necessary to make an impact (what do we need to make a difference?).
- ***Tap into the technological aptitude of young people.*** Young people can be key allies for helping organizers understand where their peers are congregating online, how to use social media to reach them, and how to use online tools more generally.
- ***Relationships are fundamental.*** Relationships are important in virtually all aspects of public engagement, but they are particularly critical when it comes to working with young people. Cindy Carlson (2010: 31), who directed the Hampton Coalition for Youth in Hampton, Virginia, says:

  > Just about everyone knows the three fundamental criteria for success in the field of real estate are location, location, location. In the field of youth civic engagement, the mantra is: relationships, relationships, relationships. The relationships between young people and adults, and among youth and their peers, are the single most influential contributor to the success of any youth engagement initiative. Youth may be attracted to the work of local government because of their passion for an issue, but they will remain engaged because of their relationships with adults and other youth they encounter.

RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

Mapping the Community. There are many ways for organizers to map the community or population with which they are working. The most basic and proven approach is simply to list the different networks and groups to which people belong. A map of social media connections can help organizers find the people who connect with, are trusted by, and curate information for others. As Christopher Swope (2014) puts it, "[online] platforms don't create trust, but they do create new ways for us to discover trust and put it to work."

All kinds of networks and groups could be represented in such a map, including but not limited to: schools, businesses, faith congregations, service clubs, sports teams, hospitals, immigrant service organizations, fire stations, colleges and universities, restaurants and coffee shops, youth groups, senior citizens' groups, grocery stores, libraries, newspapers and radio stations, police or sheriff's departments, unions, newspapers and other media organizations, community organizing groups, neighborhood or homeowners associations, laundromats, barbershops and hair salons, political parties, social service agencies, and bookstores. These lists can be made graphically interesting. For example, Figure 1 provides an example of a neighborhood-based recruitment map. In addition to illustrating the point, the Figure shows that mapping need not be complicated.

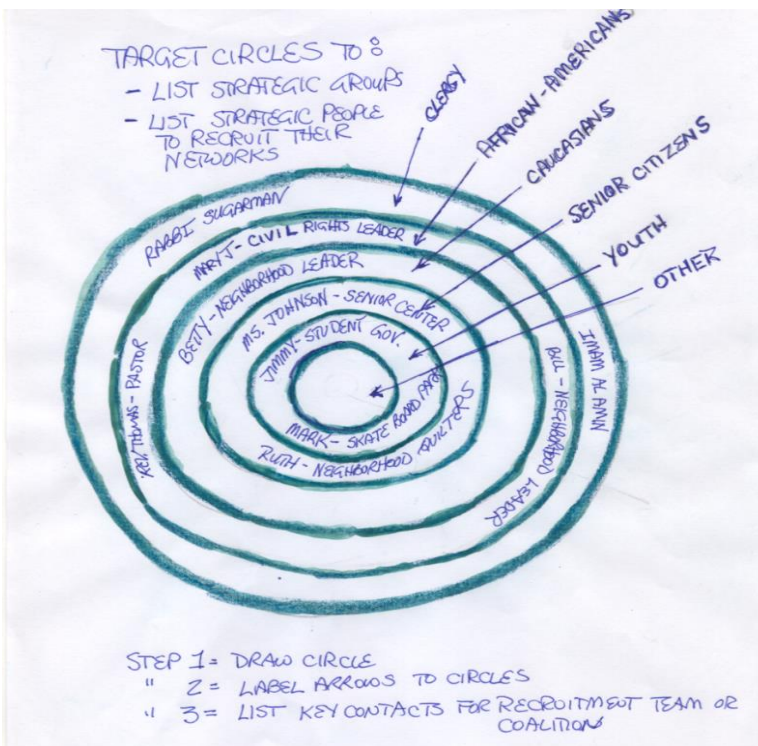

Figure 1: Example of Mapping Community Networks

Creating a recruitment map can be a participatory process in itself. As a planning activity, it can help coalition members understand one another better and produce a tangible asset they can use in other contexts. In fact, these maps and lists could be considered rare public resources. In cities like Decatur, Georgia, organizers have taken their map to other community meetings, used it as part of their presentation about their engagement process, and invited people to add new organizations and networks to it.

Creating Recruitment Plans. To capitalize on the recruitment potential of a diverse organizing coalition and a growing map of networks, organizers need a simple, coherent plan for inviting people to engage. Everyday Democracy suggests five basic steps for participant recruitment (see: http://everyday-democracy.org/tips/how-recruit-dialogue-participants):

1. ***Review your recruitment goals.*** Organizers should decide how many and what kinds of people they will reach out to. Several questions can help guide recruitment goals. How many people need to be involved to give the effort a critical mass? What kinds of people are needed for diversity (broadly defined)? Why would people from each group want to participate? What kinds of barriers might keep people in each group from participating? Are there individuals in the organizing coalition who can reach out to groups not yet involved? If not, who can help to spark their interest?

2. ***Develop talking points.*** Recruitment is easier when the message is clear and consistent. The message should give a brief overview of the project or structure, including the issue(s) that it will help people to address, and why the issue(s) are important.

3. ***Plan outreach strategies.*** While flyers, ads, mailers, social media posts, and radio time can be supplemental strategies, personal invitations – offered in-person, via email, or by phone – are almost always more effective. In general, outreach also improves when there is at least some opportunity for conversation about the program and issues and why they are important.

4. ***Give coalition members recruiting assignments.*** Organizers can ask coalition members to reach out to people in their networks. It can also be useful to set specific recruitment goals for each member. If citizens hear the message from someone they trust, they will be more likely to participate.

5. ***Take extra steps to recruit underrepresented groups.*** One of the biggest recruitment challenges is engaging people who do not often get involved in community events. This takes extra work and effort, particularly if organizers or coalition members are not part of those groups, but without it, recruitment will miss many important voices. Establishing trust is central to reaching underrepresented groups. When possible, it is useful to find a spokesperson or leader in that community that can help spread the word. Sometimes these spokespersons can be found in unlikely places, such as barbershops or restaurants.

Figures 2 and 3 illustrate some of the thinking that can go into a recruitment plan. Specifically, Figure 2 shows how organizers may begin to think about target percentages for various demographic groups. Figure 3 depicts the challenge of the recruitment 'funnel,' which suggests that only a percentage of those recruited will actually decide to participate; therefore, organizers must conduct wider outreach to meet their recruitment goals. (Figures 1, 2, and 3 were created by Jon Abercrombie of Common Focus.)

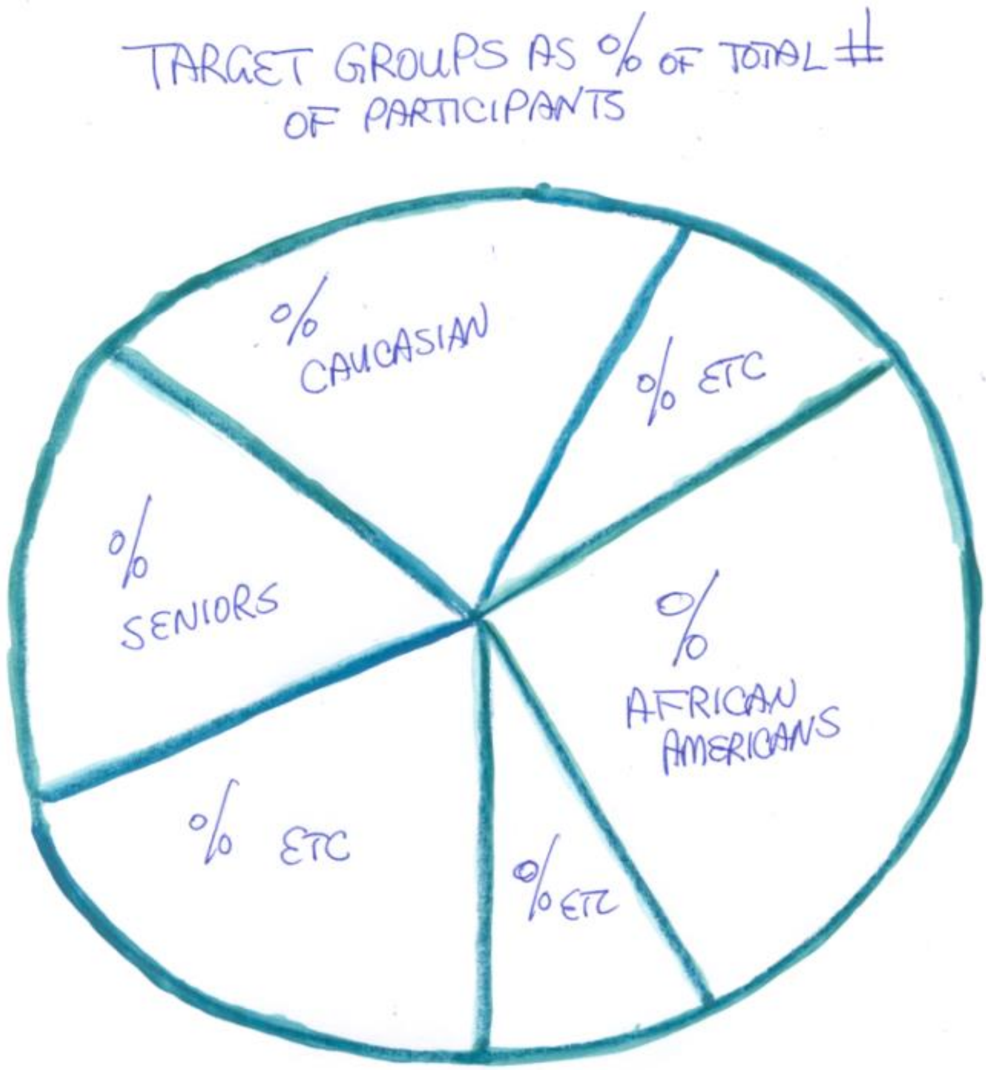

Figure 2: Example of Using Target Demographic Percentages

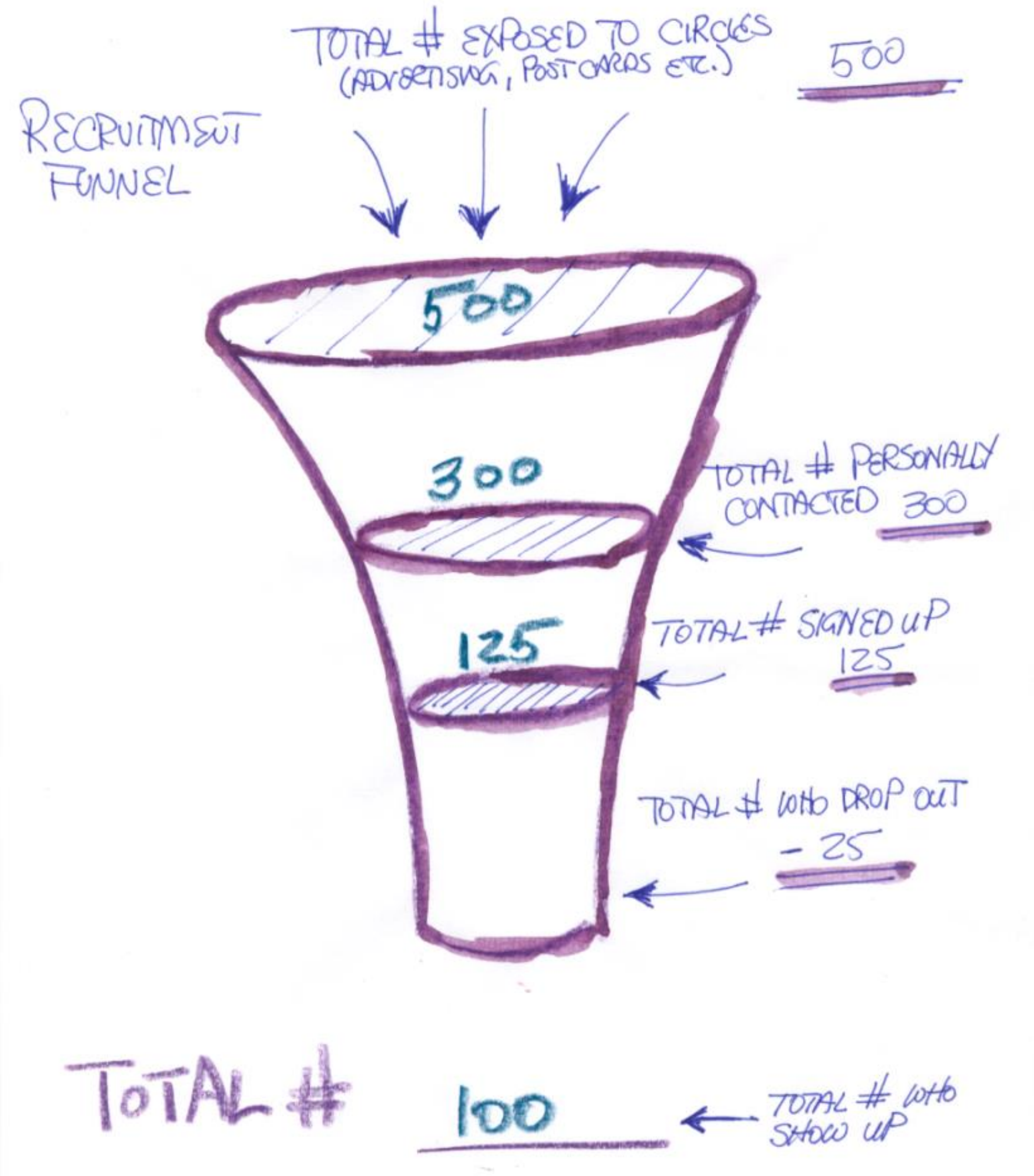

Figure 3: The Recruitment 'Funnel'

One-on-One Interviews. One of the most versatile recruitment skills was first developed and refined by community organizers decades ago: the one-on-one interview. The idea is to create a safer space for people to share their concerns and talk about their interests, and to do so in a way that encourages them to take public action. AmeriCorps Vista and Campus Compact (2010) have developed some tried-and-true questions for one-on-one interviews:

- How long have you been involved in this issue?
- Why did you get involved?
- Who do you partner with?
- What would you like to see happen on this issue?
- What is possible? What should be possible?
- Would you be able to [insert commitment/action]?
- Could you give me the names of other people to talk to?

COMMUNICATING ABOUT ENGAGEMENT

Organizers should also consider ways to communicate through the media about engagement opportunities, experiences, and impacts. The media landscape has changed dramatically in the last decade, but the same basic communication skills are useful whether one is working with "traditional media" organizations, such as newspapers and television and radio stations, or the "new media" of hyperlocal and purely online outlets. Those skills include: clear messaging, creating a media plan, feeding the discussion about engagement, and reporting on results. Below we offer suggestions, many of which are adapted from the Institute for Local Government (2013), for each of these skills.

Clear Messaging about Engagement. Since media messages are mainly one-way forms of communication, there are fewer opportunities for questions and answers; therefore, the message about the engagement opportunity has to be simple and clear. It should answer the following questions: What is at stake and why should people care? What are the engagement goals? And, what will happen if people choose to participate?

Creating a Media Plan. The most fundamental step in creating a media plan is to identify a list of media, including key reporters, bloggers, and online journalists who reach priority audiences. Organizers should then develop key story themes and think about the best vehicles and messengers for telling those stories; build relationships with key reporters and outlets; use online tools like Storify to collect and display social media messages and other information; and create an online calendar so that people can track progress and important dates.

Feeding the Discussion about Engagement. Engagement opportunities can be improved when more people – including the participants themselves – provide constructive criticism and contribute their own time and energy to making these projects and opportunities better. An important communication goal is to feed this conversation by providing information and responding to suggestions. Specifically, organizers can:

- Offer multiple opportunities, including surveys and online forums, for citizens to report on the strengths and weaknesses of engagement opportunities.
- Respond to suggestions and report back as quickly as possible.
- Share findings and lessons learned from debriefing and performance assessments.
- Follow up on commitments made by participants and other partners.
- Create an online network for information sharing.
- Recognize and thank people for their efforts to improve engagement.

Reporting on Results. At the conclusion of an engagement activity, as well as at important junctures during a process, organizers should report on what is being accomplished. Some of this information might focus on the structure or process itself, and some might focus on how engagement is influencing public decisions or producing other kinds of public action. Organizers can:

- Gather qualitative data through surveys, interviews, focus groups, or informal channels.
- Use quantitative measures to assess the engagement effort, including number and demographics of participants, website page views, and social media metrics.
- Use interviews with decision makers to describe how engagement is affecting policy making.
- Tell the stories of people who are taking action in various ways as a result of their engagement.

PROVIDING INFORMATION AND OPTIONS

Issue Framing. In a public engagement process, issue framing means presenting an issue in a way that allows people to explore different definitions of the problem, different explanations for why the problem has emerged, and different solutions. Framing is critical in public engagement: if an issue is framed poorly, for example in a confusing or biased manner, it is likely to drive people back to positional stances and exacerbate conflict. However, if the issue is framed well – clearly, comprehensively, and objectively – organizers will be better able to direct a productive, interest-based discussion about the problem.

Framing begins with *naming* the issue as a problem. As a Kettering Foundation (2011: 2) report notes, "While seemingly insignificant, who gets to name a problem—and how they name it—

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are critical factors that go a long way in determining how effective the response will be." Unfortunately, in conventional engagement processes, issues are often framed narrowly. Take for example the issue of raising local taxes to support the school system. A school board might frame the issue as: "We have to raise taxes to fund our schools." This frame is positional and narrow, and therefore likely to cause controversy and conflict. There are a number of ways to frame this issue more broadly:

- Are our schools in financial crisis, and if so, what should we do? (This frame invites participants to become more informed, decide for themselves whether there is a crisis, and weigh in on different options for raising the level of funding.)
- Should we provide more funding for education, and if so, how should we spend that money? (This frame gives non-educators a role in deciding how funds should be allocated.)
- How should we improve the quality of education we provide? (This frame opens up the possibility of other changes that could be made by educators to improve schools, and other actions that parents, community groups, and other non-educators might take to strengthen the education system.)

As the issue becomes more broadly named, it becomes larger and more complicated – but also more open to a wider range of viewpoints, ideas, and contributions.

Sequencing Discussions. Many engagement processes require some kind of agenda or guide that establishes a helpful, flexible structure for addressing a particular issue or problem. The formats vary by length: some of these processes bring participants together for only an hour or less, while others include a number of sessions that take place over the course of an entire day or multiple meetings spread over several weeks.

From years of experimentation, a successful sequence has emerged for these kinds of guides, and the discussions they support:

1. An ***initial discussion*** or session that helps the facilitator get the group started, guides the group through the process of setting ground rules (discussed below), provides discussion questions aimed at eliciting the personal experiences of participants, and sometimes includes scenarios or cases to help the group relate the issue to their own lives.
2. One or more ***middle discussions*** that help the group explore the main arguments being made about the issue. The middle sessions are organized around more far-reaching questions such as: "What are the root causes of the problem?" or "What should our goals be?" Middle sessions often contain an outline of the main viewpoints about the issue, written in plain, jargon-free language. These views could include expert opinions, or the main proposals of policymakers. They might also reflect the main answers being given to the question, voiced by citizens, experts, and officials alike.
3. A ***final discussion*** that helps participants develop their action ideas or

recommendations and make some initial plans for implementing them. This session often includes brainstorming and prioritizing questions (discussed below), and a long list of action ideas that may be taken from success stories in other communities.

Getting through this sequence requires time. It is unrealistic to expect a group of 8-12 people to move from sharing experiences to action planning in less than about three hours, and the more complex the problem or issue, the more time required (see Figure 4). Smaller groups can often move more quickly.

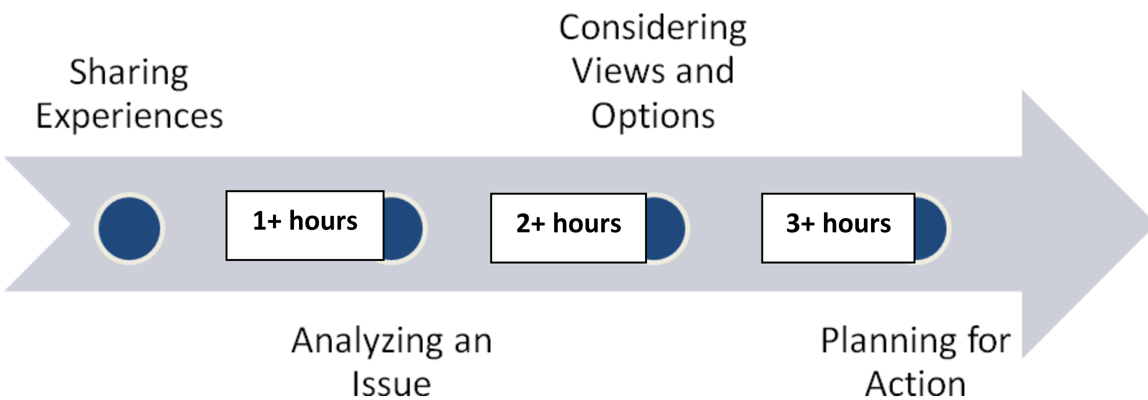

Figure 4: Time Required in a Deliberative Sequence for a Group of 8-12 people

Writing Discussion Materials. Discussion materials for engagement should be as neutral and unbiased as possible. This does not mean writing a guide that contains no strong opinions or revealing information; rather, it means mean naming and framing the issue in a broad and compelling way, including a range of clearly labeled views, and making it clear that the guide is a tool for discussion, not a curriculum intended to "educate" participants.

There are some basic steps for presenting a range of views in discussion materials:

- ***Read widely about the issue.*** This will not only help organizers identify some of the main arguments being made by academics, public officials, and others, but will also help prepare them to talk knowledgeably with these people.
- ***Consult the 'experts' – and everyday people.*** Organizers should talk with academics, public officials, and people who work in organizations dealing with the issue. They should also do some simple grassroots research by asking non-experts what they

think about the issue and pay attention to the language those people use to describe it.

- ***Look beyond the 'poles' of the issue.*** Sometimes, the political debates surrounding controversial issues are dominated by people at the extremes, or poles, of the discussion. For example, the abortion debate is often portrayed as a stark choice between pro-life and pro-choice activists, whereas the views of most Americans fall somewhere in the middle.

In addition to including a broad range of views, the language of discussion materials should be as balanced as possible. There are two proven techniques for achieving this kind of balance. First, the title of each session – and perhaps the title of the whole process – can be stated in the form of a question. A question mark shows that organizers are asking for ideas and opinions rather than trying to persuade people on a particular point of view. Second, remind the reader that the guide is a tool for facilitators and participants. Make it clear that the materials do not cover every possible view or action idea. Insert a discussion question that asks "Is there a view that is missing? What would you add?"

MANAGING DISCUSSIONS

Facilitating Face-to-Face Groups. The basic definition of "facilitate" is to make easy or easier. Within the context of public engagement, the word facilitate means to lead (and make easier) a group discussion, for example, by guiding conversations, asking questions, mediating between opposing viewpoints, ensuring that all participants' views are heard, reflecting and summarizing what is said, following the agenda, and keeping time. The facilitator's main task is to create a safe environment where each participant feels comfortable expressing ideas and responding to those of others.

The facilitator does not "teach" participants, but instead guides the participants through discussions. She does not have to be an expert in the subject being discussed, because facilitators' opinions and views should not be contributed. Facilitators should think of themselves as impartial "guardians of the process."

Facilitators should clearly explain their role to participants at the start of a process, and never "take off their hat" and step out of that role. They should encourage and affirm each participant, ask for the group's help in making the conversation work well for everyone, and be aware of things they might do unconsciously (like leaning back when they disagree with a statement). Facilitators should also:

- **Be prepared.** Effective facilitators are familiar with the discussion materials and think ahead of time about the directions in which the discussion might go.
- **Set a relaxed and open tone.** Effective facilitators welcome everyone and create a friendly and relaxed atmosphere. Humor is always welcome.

- **Establish ground rules.** Effective facilitators should establish or help the group establish ground rules at the beginning of sessions.
- **Monitor and assist the group process.** Effective facilitators keep track of how the group members are participating – who has (and has not) spoken and what points have and have not been heard. They do not let any one person dominate and try to involve everyone in the discussion.
- **Allow time for pauses and silence.** Effective facilitators understand that people need time to reflect and respond. They do not talk after each comment or answer every question, but rather allow participants to respond directly to each other.
- **Lean toward non-intervention.** Effective facilitators try to intervene in discussions as little as possible, but recognize when intervention is necessary. When intervening, effective facilitators follow the "mouse principle": they do as little as possible, as quietly as possible.

Recording. Recording or scribing during facilitation has many benefits: it lets people know they have been heard and that their ideas have been recognized; it provides a "transcript" of the meeting to help with future discussions and decisions, and can provide information to those who did not attend the meeting; and it helps keep participants on track with the agenda. Recording can be done on flipcharts in front of the group, on a laptop or tablet, or through audio taping and other technologies.

When recording is done visibly, for example on flipcharts, people can see what has happened and are more likely to submit ideas. Moreover, it can increase people's attention and reduce the likelihood that they repeat themselves or obsess on a particular idea. Visible recording is generally less helpful, and can be intrusive, early in a process when participants are sharing experiences and getting to know each other better.

Skills for effective scribing include: writing legibly, capturing every speaker's main ideas (without writing sentences word for word); and organizing a great deal of verbal data. Some tips for scribing include: alternating colors, numbering pages, and using a "parking lot" to capture ideas that are relevant, but off-topic, or that need to be discussed at a later date.

Online Moderation. Moderators of online forums need basic familiarity with the platform being used, but assuming the platform is relatively simple, technological skills are not that important to this role. However, online moderators do need many of the same qualities that make face-to-face facilitators successful, such as a friendly disposition, good listening skills, and a desire to hear different perspectives.

Sometimes the role of a moderator varies depending on the life span of the forum. Steven Clift (2014) recommends that when a forum is first set up, online moderators:

- Welcome new participants and encourage a round of introductions.
- Encourage people to use their real names (and, if possible, configure the forum so that participants must register with their real names).
- Explain how the forum works, and how participants can adjust their settings, for example to receive posts or messages with the frequency they would like.
- Start a discussion about the purpose of the forum and the ground rules participants might want to adopt.
- Configure the forum settings so that the first post or message from each participant must be approved by the moderator. After that, participants can post or send messages immediately to the group.
- Encourage people to share school or neighborhood announcements, and to offer their ideas and opinions.

Once the forum is up and running, Clift recommends that moderators:

- Continue to welcome new participants and ask them to introduce themselves.
- "Seed" the discussion when forum interactions slow down, for example by presenting a relevant topic and questions, or by finding and posting relevant announcements.
- Keep an eye on the messages or posts, without necessarily reading them word-for-word.
- Monitor and enforce ground rules on civility and posting, and if necessary facilitate a discussion about whether (and how) ground rules should be changed.
- Seek assistance from other moderators or engagement allies to deal with those who continually break the ground rules. (In many cases, continual offenders can be barred from the forum, but this must be done carefully and in accordance with all rules and laws governing the forum.)
- Find ways to bring forum participants together face-to-face.

Ground Rules. In both face-to-face and online settings, ground rules can be helpful for establishing the purpose of group, outlining how meetings and conversations will be conducted, ensuring that conflict is addressed but not escalated, and creating a safe environment to discuss difficult and controversial issues. The general premise behind ground rules is that all participants should be treated equally and fairly.

Ground rules may be offered or developed in several different ways, though two approaches are the most common. First, the facilitator can list some sample ground rules for the conversation and invite participants to accept, reject, or edit them, and to propose new rules. Second, the facilitator can work with the group to develop ground rules from scratch. In this case, members of the group can propose a rule, and if most participants agree to it, the rule can be added to the list. In all cases, after presenting the ground rules to the group, the facilitator should make sure that the rules are agreeable to all.

The ground rules described here, and the participatory process for developing and adhering to them, stand in stark contrast to Robert's Rules of Order, the most commonly used guidelines in conventional engagement formats. Robert's Rules are typically preset, cannot be changed by the group, and often seem arcane to people who do not use them often. The ground rules that have emerged during the last twenty years in successful engagement projects are more informal and egalitarian; in a number of places they have been referred to, facetiously but accurately, as "Bob's Rules" (see Box 2).

Box 2: Bob's Rules (Robert's kinder, gentler sibling)

Respect other people, their ideas and opinions.

Do not interrupt others.

Try to say it in 25 words or less.

Speak only to the topic at hand.

No side conversations.

When an idea has been stated previously and you agree, only speak when you have something new to add.

Everyone gets a chance to share their opinion before someone speaks again.

Speaking briefly and staying focused is everyone's responsibility. This will make the meeting run smoothly.

These are everybody's rules and everyone is responsible for seeing that they are followed.

(Provided by Cece Hughley-Noel, Southeast Uplift in Portland, Oregon)

Ground rules should be easily accessible and visible. For example, in a face-to-face meeting they can be posted on the wall, and in an online forum they can posted in a way that makes them easy to find. This makes it easier to refer to them and ensure that they are followed.

HELPING PARTICIPANTS GENERATE AND EVALUATE IDEAS

A common practice in all kinds of engagement settings is generating, refining, evaluating, and ranking ideas. Two skills are particularly helpful for supporting these activities: brainstorming and visioning to generate ideas and using ABC standards (see below) to evaluate ideas.

Brainstorming and Visioning. Some engagement opportunities will directly center on generating new ideas and information, while others may only need to generate ideas as one of the steps in the process. Generating ideas is sometimes called ideation, especially when it is done online. Whether done in online or face-to-face settings, ideation relies on brainstorming and visioning.

At its heart, brainstorming combines informal problem solving with lateral thinking and fun. During the brainstorming process, groups are encouraged to develop as many ideas for addressing a problem as quickly as they can.

Visioning is very similar to brainstorming; however, it is more future-focused. Instead of asking people to come up with ideas for problem solving, it asks people to look to some point in the future when the problem has been solved and generate ideas about what the situation looks like without the problem being present.

The steps of brainstorming and visioning are similar and simple: the facilitator prepares the group by explaining the process and the rules, presents the problem or issue to be addressed, and guides the discussion while reinforcing five simple rules:

1. Don't evaluate or criticize ideas; defer judgment.
2. Quantity is the goal; the wilder the ideas, the better.
3. Record each idea.
4. Building upon or combining ideas is OK.
5. No one owns any idea.

The actual process of brainstorming and visioning can be done in several different ways. Facilitators can use (1) an unstructured approach, where participants offer ideas in no particular order and as ideas come to them, or (2) a round robin approach, where participants take turns offering ideas. In settings where the issue is sensitive, facilitators might use (3) an anonymous alternatives approach, where participants are given index cards on which to write their ideas. In settings where the issue is divisive, facilitators might (4) ask participants to "be somebody else" and offer ideas from that particular perspective. (For more variations on brainstorming, visioning, and other ideation techniques, see: http://www.mindtools.com/brainstm.html.)

Using ABC Standards. Once ideas are generated, they usually need to be evaluated. As suggested by the rules of brainstorming and visioning, it is important to defer evaluation until the ideation process is over. During the evaluation process, the group should work through the ideas together, all the while building agreement and resolving concerns.

In general, the best options are those that are future-oriented and consider the interests of all participants. In some cases, additional evaluation criteria – or standards that define the qualities or facets of a good solution – may be needed. Using and defining "A-B-C standards" can be particularly helpful:

- A – Is the idea/option Achievable? Is it workable, practical, and feasible?
- B – Is the idea/option Believable? Is it at least somewhat realistic and will it be acceptable to all or most parties?
- C – Is the idea/option Cost-effective? Is it affordable and fiscally responsible?

Additional standards can be added as necessary. For example, participants may want to add standards that help assess whether an option is legal, fair, environmentally friendly, and so on.

Once the standards are in place and agreed to, participants can begin evaluating ideas. Some basic, proven steps in evaluating options are: (1) clarify all ideas; (2) eliminate duplicate ideas; (3) eliminate ideas if everyone agrees; and (4) cluster related ideas. Once this is done, then the ideas can be tested with the group. To do so, each idea should be assessed against the standards or evaluation criteria established by the group and against the interests of the group members (does the option satisfy or harm any important interests?). Ideas that do not meet the standards and/or do not satisfy interests should either be modified or eliminated. The remaining ideas should be further discussed to identify areas where there is agreement and concern and possibilities for modification to address concerns.

HELPING PARTICIPANTS MAKE GROUP DECISIONS

In some participatory processes, people will need to select among options or alternatives, or make other kinds of decisions about implementation or action. Two skills may be particularly helpful for making decisions in participatory processes: dotmocracy and keypad polling.

Dotmocracy. One technique for making decisions is dotmocracy, also known as dot-voting or idea rating, which is useful for ranking or selecting ideas, alternatives, or options (Diceman 2014). In dotmocracy, the facilitator gives all participants an equal number of stickers (usually dots, but any stickers will do; or markers can be used in place of stickers). The options are written legibly and largely, usually on individual flipchart sheets that are posted on a wall. Participants are then invited to "vote" for their favorite options by placing their stickers on the flipchart sheets. Participants may spread their votes among a number of options, or consolidate their votes on a single option. The option(s) with the most dots at the end of voting "win." One variation of dotmocracy uses different color stickers to signify different values, for example, a green dot means something is liked and a red dot means it is disliked.

When using dotmocracy, facilitators should be conscious of at least two important issues. First, they must attend to the number of options being put up for a vote. There is a balance between having too few options (where there is not much from which to choose) and too many options (where participants cannot effectively review, consider, and compare ideas). Expanding the number of options is probably best left to the participants, though if necessary, facilitators could unpack different ideas that have been consolidated into a single option. Reducing the number of options can be done by consolidating similar ideas or generalizing unique ideas into broader concepts. Second, facilitators should be aware of posting options that are very similar, as this can cause vote-splitting and ultimately lead to the penalization or dismissal of ideas.

Keypad Polling. Handheld keypads have become a commonly used tool in all kinds of meetings to poll participants, rank options, collect data, and conduct surveys. The first keypads, or 'clickers,' were handheld devices that looked somewhat like a remote control. Although these are still used today, there are also various apps, software, and texting tools, such as Poll Everywhere, PrioritySpend, and OneCounts, that enable people to use their smartphones in the same way.

Regardless of the particular technology used, keypad polling allows facilitators to ask multiple choice questions to which participants can respond immediately. The aggregated responses can be displayed almost instantaneously on a large screen. Martín Carcasson and Michelle Currie (2013: 2) assert that "Keypads allow meeting organizers to interact more directly with audiences while capturing and displaying results in real time. When used well, they can increase participant satisfaction, improve interaction and process flow and assist in capturing useful data."

Carcasson and Currie (2013) identify several kinds of questions that can be asked with keypad polling, including:

- Demographic questions about age, gender, background, and political affiliation so that everyone can get a sense of "who is in the room."
- Fact questions to better understand what people know about the issue being discussed.
- Experience questions, for example, how often people use public transportation or whether they have been a victim of crime.
- Perspective questions to gauge attitudes or identify views.
- Prioritization and comparative questions to understand how the group weighs different options.
- Process and assessment questions to get a sense of participants' satisfaction with the process.

Keypad polling has several advantages. It provides opportunities for everyone to participate, which can improve meeting dynamics and prevent meetings from being dominated by the loudest voices. It can provide immediate feedback on issues and give transparency to the process of gathering and analyzing input – the participants see the results at the same time as the facilitators and decision-makers in the room. Finally, it complements small-group discussions well – by moving back and forth between the relative intimacy of a dialogue and the spectacle of the voting process, the meeting can allow insights to emerge while also giving people a sense of the potential impact of their engagement (see Campt and Freeman 2010; Carcasson and Currie 2013).

SUPPORTING ACTION EFFORTS

Ideas for action emerge naturally in many different forms of public engagement. When people talk about issues that are important to them, they often want to:

- Develop new problem-solving partnerships and new ways to work with others.
- Express their ideas, concerns, and recommendations to public officials and other decision makers.
- Strengthen practices and policies within departments, agencies, community organizations, workplaces, or other groups.

In some single-day participatory processes, action ideas are shared at the end of the day. In others, there is a separate action-focused event where participants can come together to share ideas. Still others facilitate action efforts with online tools and tactics. Two skills, planning action events and supporting action teams, can be helpful for all of these processes.

Planning an Action-Focused Event. Events that help people transition from dialogue to action typically have three elements:

- **Opportunities for dialogue groups to share their ideas.** If participants brainstormed and prioritized action ideas, then the action event should include opportunities for each group to share their top ideas.
- **Prioritizing action ideas.** During the action event, give people the opportunity to vote for their top three choices for action ideas (perhaps by using keypad polling or dotmocracy) Organizers sometimes encourage a mix of short-term and long-term action projects. Short-term projects keep the momentum of the dialogues going and provide an immediate success to share with the community. Long-term goals require more planning, but such efforts can result in lasting change.
- **Creating action teams.** Identify the action ideas with the most votes or support. Ask people to divide into groups based on the action they would like to work on and explain that the people in these new "action teams" will work together to put the idea into motion. During the action event, give these new teams some time to introduce themselves, gather contact information, and identify co-leaders who will help the group move forward with the idea.

Supporting Action Teams. Promoting team pride, hosting regular meetings with action team leaders, and fostering a creative environment are some ways to help a group or team prepare a plan and then take action. Action teams should:

- **Set clear expectations.** What needs to happen, by when, and who is responsible? If people know what they are expected to do and by when, they are better able to develop a roadmap for achieving specific tasks and goals.
- **Identify two leaders per team**. Co-chairs can share the responsibility of keeping the team on course and moving forward.
- **Share skills and talents.** Ask team members to write down some of their talents and skills, so when the group needs to complete tasks, requests can be made to people who have the requisite skills.
- **Foster a creative environment.** Be open and welcome diverse ideas and ways of thinking. Show that everyone is valued and is an important part of the group.
- **Continue recruiting volunteers.** Even if people were not involved in the initial conversations, they may be interested in taking action. Allowing new people to join brings in fresh energy and cultivates a larger network, greater inclusion, and a stronger sense of ownership of the effort.
- **Keep in touch.** Meet regularly and keep everyone informed via emails and calls. Consider forming an online network (see above) and using online tools and tactics.
- **Share documents and plans.** Wikis can be used to help team members work together on documents and stay informed about plans (Mergel 2011).
- **Connect teams to resources.** Organizers can provide information, contacts, and resources to action teams.
- **Celebrate progress.** Keep the work of the team in the public eye by engaging media and sharing success stories.

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