



Community Power: Civic Engagement for a Healthy Democracy

Session 1: Power Mapping

November 9, 2023

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How to Use These Slides

- ❑ At your next team meeting, brainstorm how your team approaches community power in your work.
 - ❑ Identify: How can you facilitate networks between stakeholders and community?
 - ❑ Discuss: How can stakeholder priorities be supportive of community priorities?

- ❑ Using the worksheet provided (slide 11):
 - ❑ Work with a colleague to map out specific partners in the decision maker map.
 - ❑ Work with a community partner to align on and uncover community priorities.
 - ❑ Similar to how you mapped out priorities for ‘community,’ write down priorities for other decision makers.

Session Framing & Overview

The **Park Equity Communities of Practice** is a capacity building and peer learning network that brings together cities throughout the U.S. to focus on improving park equity. Through a co-creation and rigorous approach, we work to generate policy recommendations, resources, and guidance that supports changing park equity practices on the ground.

This track seeks to develop strategies for city leaders and public space stewards to better collaborate and create policies that leverage parks as an essential driver of **Community Power**, defined as:

“The ability of people facing similar circumstances to develop, sustain, and grow an organized base of people who act together through democratic structures to set agendas, shift public discourse, influence who makes decisions, and cultivate ongoing relationships of mutual accountability with decision makers that change systems.”

During the November session, participants completed a Power Mapping exercise that invited leaders to identify how local communities demonstrate power and which groups hold decision-making authority in their cities.

What We Heard

Community power can look like:

- Hearing all residents, not just the loudest voices
- Community feels empowered to voice opinions/needs
- Strong channels for dialogue exist
- Solidarity between residents exists
- Community drives process, outcomes, and governance; residents benefit directly

Community priorities range from:

- Physical safety in parks and neighborhoods
- Physical and social access
- Belonging/ownership in the space
- Representation of culture and experiences in parks and programs
- Institutional resources and capacity to support community

Consider:

What does community power look like to you?

What are your community's park priorities?

Recommendations for an Equitable Power Map

- ❑ Recognize that the **community already has the power** – our role is to facilitate the expression of power by creating tools, resources, and platforms for community leadership.
- ❑ Apply an **equity lens** to representation and levels of influence among stakeholder groups.
- ❑ Create and give **authority** to community leadership committees and cross-sector partnerships to ensure development plans are equitable.
- ❑ Facilitate **access to participation** through creative use of multilingual offerings, leveraging tech (or not) when appropriate, and frequent/varied methods of communication.
- ❑ Ensure communication is **proactive** and **validating** – even when there is disagreement. Follow up.
- ❑ Embrace **creativity** when creating or taking on community engagement roles. Take advantage of parks’ “fun” reputation to build trust and experiment with non-traditional methods of outreach/engagement.

Examples From the Field

Houston Parks Board

The Community Champions Group formed out of a study of community needs. A hands-off funder allowed HPB to use the money as best fit, which included supporting community members as they co-created outreach plans and produced their own events in/began building new parks. The following questions remains: will they be able to continue organizing/engaging once the project is built? How can HPB help sustain their power?



Olmsted Parks Conservancy

Work on Elliott Park started with walking with a trusted community member and meeting people from all parts of the community, lots of boots on the ground, and working with cross-sector groups. During the pandemic, they utilized project boards with questions, online surveys, and text messages to reach people more effectively. They also used alternative channels that helped to build trust, such as volunteering and delivering meals to seniors.



Questions for Continuing Conversations

- How can we engage hard-to-reach communities?
- How can we navigate a deep lack of trust in city government?
- How can we manage conflicting community needs and desires?



Additional Resources

10-Minute Walk Communities of Practice

Find session recordings, presentations, and resources for each track.

The Common Ground Framework

The Framework demonstrates how the formation of social ties, a sense of belonging, and engagement with civic action can set up neighbors to shape and achieve their health, climate resilience, and equity goals. It's a call to action for park advocates, shedding light on community engagement strategies, policy recommendations, and research needs that can drive a kinder, more connected future.

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in many public participation plans.

Community Tool Box: Identifying and Analyzing Stakeholders and Their Interests

Learn how to increase your effort's success by recruiting community members who have a vested interest in the effort both directly and indirectly.

Lessons From the Ground: Best Practices in Fair Housing Planning

While focused on housing, this toolkit from HUD provides useful strategies for fostering sustained and inclusive community engagement. Of particular interest are strategies related to community follow-up and targeting harder-to-reach populations.

Rethinking Home: Engaging Transient and New Communities in Big Local

UK-based organizations LocalTrust and Just Ideas collaborated on a study of engagement methods and best practices for reaching “new” and “transient” communities. The learnings from this study may be relevant for practitioners working in communities with lower levels of social cohesion or permanence.



Power Mapping Worksheet

City name

What does community power look like in your work?

Answer here:

Who are the decision makers in your current park project?

Community %	Elected officials %	Public sector %	Private sector %	Nonprofit sector %	Other %
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Who do you mean by community?

- *Community organization types, identifying factors of key stakeholder groups*
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And what might their priorities be?

- *Health equity, food access, etc.*
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