Community Power: Civic Engagement for a Healthy Democracy

Session 2: Participatory Planning

January 18, 2024

Connecting everyone to the outdoors™

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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. We work to co-create policy recommendations, resources, and guidance that supports changing park equity practices on the ground.

The second session of the Community Power track focused on **tactical support and key principles for participatory design**. Participatory design is widely accepted as a creative approach to make products and services better reflect community needs. Less understood is the potential for communities to engage in civic processes by seeing their feedback come to life.

Center for Urban Pedagogy Executive Director, Pilar Finuccio, presented on their approach to participatory design, following guidance from a CUP resource Dick and Rick: A Visual Primer for Social Impact Design.

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Strategies for Moving Beyond "Business As Usual"

❏ Employ multi-pronged efforts to **meet people where they are**, i.e. pop-ups, talking boards/picture boards to community events that are already happening.
- ❏ Demonstrate intentionality around planning meetings – have food, translations, childcare, opportunities for youth involvement. Ask people where, when, and how the best ways to meet are. Go to people, don't make them come to you.
- ❏ When you're in community settings (park renovation site, schools, cafes, etc.) spend time just getting to know the community without an agenda.

❏ Provide the **proper tools and resources** to support participation.
- ❏ Offer translation – not just of printed/online materials, but at in-person engagements too.
- ❏ Bridge the gap between conceptual and tangible by providing visual tools in handouts to break down confusing processes.
- ❏ Working with local government is a very American concept – do not presume everyone has the skills or technical knowledge necessary to participate in the process or that they know they are welcome to speak for themselves and will be taken seriously.

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Strategies for Moving Beyond "Business As Usual"

❏ Develop a **diverse stakeholder group** and meet with them before the project starts – they are the advisors for the project.

❏ Strive to always reach new communities.
  ❏ Identify an existing community leader to be introduced to this new group. The goal should be to **listen and learn**, not immediate action.

❏ Build relationships and trust with **intentionality**. Not every interaction is transactional or outcomes oriented. **Show up** outside of project-specific events or meetings, even if it's not in your primary language, to get to know people.
  ❏ Understand that residents are the experts. Be open minded.

❏ Take advantage of opportunities to work with the community when they reach out to you, rather than the other way around. When the community views you as a resource, it shows they trust you.

❏ Go back to the community after conversations to show how the processes have been done. **Show progress** made based on community input, even if it's small.

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Barriers to Participatory Design

❏ Leadership may view participatory design practices as **"extra"** and **"nice-to-have"** rather than necessary, limiting opportunities to explore new approach community engagement.

❏ Over-reliance on **standard/accepted practices**, e.g. Advisory Groups, leads to the same voices captured and the exclusion of broader input or a diverse set of perspectives.

❏ The **one-directional** nature of standard engagement processes creates drop-off among participants who feel disempowered after participating and not seeing their time or expertise reflected in outcomes.

❏ When agencies take over the role of convener, rather than defer to existing trusted partners, it can create power imbalances. Although this approach allows the agency to maintain control, it can create an **ownership struggle** rather than partnership.

❏ Equally valuing and acknowledging different kinds of **expertise**, including both technical knowledge and lived experience, is an essential but sometimes overlooked step to genuine participation.

❏ **Managing and understanding expectations** from both parties. Community members may expect to see tangible, quantifiable results, even though progress is often slow and intangible. Set expectations around what progress looks like from the beginning.

❏ The **"Decide, Announce & Defend"** approach many agencies employ often turns people off immediately and leaves little room to recover trust.

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Examples From the Field

Lexington, KY

*For the planning of programming of a new community center in a park we brought in 30 nonprofits and faith based organizations and asked how they saw themselves in the center. We asked: '**What needs did your community have?'** rather than planning programming without first evaluating need.*

Lewisville, TX

*We started a mobile recreation unit that went out to public housing complexes where we lacked relationships, **taking time to develop relationships without a plan**. Spending time where people already felt comfortable helped create trust and build new relationships.*

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Questions for Continuing Conversations

- **Compensating residents for engagement** – what supports equitable participation versus what just drives participation?

- **Navigating power struggles** – how do you get government agencies to hand over control to the community and/or value community expertise?

- **Moving beyond "extras"** – how can you convince leadership to move beyond accepted practices for community engagement towards participatory design?

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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 determining 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.

Center for Urban Pedagogy
CUP collaborates with community organizations and schools, visual designers and artists, to make information about the public policies, processes, and systems that define our lives, accessible.

Center for Urban Pedagogy: Dick & Rick
Dick & Rick is a project of CUP and community partners that serves as a visual primer for social impact design. The guide illustrates common practices and challenges to help practitioners lead better community-engaged design practices.

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