

STRENGTHENING AND SUSTAINING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

A guide from
Public Agenda

A Planning Guide for Communities



Bill Cheyrou / Alamy Stock Photo

**Strengthening and Sustaining
Public Engagement: A Planning Guide
for Communities**

A Guide from Public Agenda

“Strengthening and Sustaining Public Engagement” was supported by the Innovations and Collaborations program at the Vermont Community Foundation. Matt Leighninger was the lead author, and Nicole Cabral, Susan Clark, Sue McCormack, Helen Beattie, Harry Frank, Paul Costello, John Castle and Jennifer Botzjorns provided invaluable advice, suggestions and text.

Available online at:

www.publicagenda.org/pages/strengthening-and-sustaining-public-engagement-guide

Copyright © 2017 Public Agenda

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Unported license. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons at 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, CA 94105, USA

STRENGTHENING AND SUSTAINING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

A Planning Guide for Communities

Introduction	2
Common Setting for Engagement	3
What is Engagement?	4
Why Does Good Engagement Matter?	6
When is Engagement Really Important?.	7
Types of Engagement: Conventional, Thick and Thin.	8
Taking Stock of How Engagement Happens in Your Community	9
Building Blocks for Stronger Systems of Engagement	11
Tools and Structures to Consider	13
Appendix: Public Engagement Tactics and Goals	17

INTRODUCTION

On all kinds of issues, people want more choices, more information and more of a say. Whether the topic is how schools should work or what should be in the local budget, people want their voices to be heard. And residents have a lot to contribute, not only with their input and ideas but with their volunteer time and willingness to work together to solve problems. In a variety of ways, people want to be engaged.

America has a long history of public engagement. For one thing, towns across America have been holding town and school meetings for hundreds of years. Citizens have engaged in ways that are less formal but equally significant: working with teachers to help their kids, volunteering on projects to improve their communities, and more recently, connecting online with neighbors in order to share ideas and address local problems.

But while Americans may feel that they want to engage, it is also clear that many of the conventional opportunities for engagement aren't working so well. In fact, many people are highly frustrated with the kinds of engagement they have experienced. Residents sometimes feel like public officials or school administrators have made all the key decisions before the engagement even begins. Meanwhile, people who work in government or the schools are often frustrated that only a few people show up to public meetings—and the people who do show up are mainly there to complain. Even the parent-teacher conference, one of the most common examples of engagement in the education system, sometimes seems like a waste of time: parents and teachers alike often say that these meetings are too short and too unfocused to result in any real cooperation to help the student. Overall, participation in these traditional engagement opportunities has been declining for years.

Is This Guide for Schools? Local Governments? Both?

This is a guide for all Americans—including people working in school systems or local governments, elected officials and all residents who want to be meaningfully engaged in the public life of their communities.

In this changing environment, the public should take time to think through what kinds of engagement we want today. What kinds of meetings, events or online connections might be attractive to residents, and help make communities more informed, empowered and connected?

This guide is intended to help residents decide what kinds of engagement they want. It is also designed to help people plan for an overall system for engagement that features those opportunities—and is supported by local governments, school systems, businesses, faith communities, other organizations and by citizens themselves.

WHAT IS ENGAGEMENT?

Engagement can mean many different things. Most people use the word to describe situations where people are coming together to make a decision or solve a problem. Usually, but not always, they are thinking of situations where people who represent government, the schools or some other institution are at the center of the process.

But those aren't the only kinds of engagement. There can also be engagement between teachers and students, parents and other family members. Engagement can also be between neighbors working to sustain a volunteer fire department, make decisions about land use or plan a town barbecue.

Some of the most common settings for engagement are:

- Town meetings and school meetings.
- Local online spaces such as Nextdoor, email lists, or Facebook groups.
- Meetings of Parent-Teacher Associations and other parent groups.
- Town or city commissions or advisory boards set up to make decisions about planning and zoning, public lands or other issues
- Parent-teacher conferences or, increasingly, parent-teacher-student conferences.
- One-on-one interactions with government or school staff.



Discussions in the community



Community meeting



One-on-one



Town meeting and school meeting



Parent-teacher conference



Planning commission



Local online networks

COMMON SETTINGS FOR ENGAGEMENT

The most productive, intensive kinds of engagement allow people to share hopes and concerns, learn from each other and make decisions or recommendations. In some cases, people also come up with new ideas and work together to implement them.

Interactive	Everyone has a chance to contribute.
Timely	It happens at a point when people can have an influence on important decisions.
Inclusive	It brings together a wide range of people, including people who may have been excluded or not engaged before.
Authentic	People value one another's input and know the process will have meaningful results.
Transparent	It is open, honest and understandable.
Informed	Everyone has access to the knowledge and data they need, and there is balanced information describing the pros and cons of different options.
Accessible	The barriers to participation, including location, time, language and other factors that might deter people, are as low as possible.
Responsive	What people say is documented and decision-makers report back to participants on the outcomes of engagement.
Network-building	Engagement helps to build relationships and networks over the long term.
Evaluated	People are able to track and measure how engagement is working.

It may be a mistake, however, to expect every single engagement opportunity—every meeting, every online discussion, every parent-teacher conference—to fit all of the principles listed above. The entire list may be necessary for the most intensive, high-stakes engagement processes, but not for others. Instead, use this list to take stock of all the different kinds of engagement happening in your community: the whole system of engagement. As a whole, does the system reflect these principles?

WHY DOES GOOD ENGAGEMENT MATTER?

Because unproductive engagement is damaging. In most conventional public meetings, such as public forums and hearings, the only real interaction between citizens and officials is the opportunity for residents to ask questions or make statements. These kinds of meetings are frustrating to citizens, officials and staff, and they have been shown to decrease trust in government. When citizens do not trust governments or school systems, they are less likely to volunteer and less likely to support those institutions financially.

Because productive engagement results in better policies. When people come together in well-structured processes, where they can talk in small groups about what they have learned and what they want to recommend, the resulting policies and plans are smarter, more broadly supported and better reflect what citizens want. Communities can avoid the confusion, misinformation and anger that come from the “decide and defend” approach to making public decisions.

Because productive engagement strengthens citizenship. When engagement goes well, it has positive effects on people. Participants become more knowledgeable about issues, they sometimes change their opinions and they become more likely to vote and volunteer.

Because productive engagement strengthens our communities. When the whole system of community engagement is working well, there are a number of benefits:

- **Improved collaboration.** When there are stronger connections between people and groups in the community, they are more likely to work together to solve problems. This is one reason why community engagement is important to student-centered learning, which requires that students have access to internships, apprenticeships and other opportunities to learn on the job or in the community. When community members feel invested in schools and schools are strongly connected to businesses and other organizations, high-quality, meaningful learning opportunities are more likely to happen.
- **Stronger social networks.** When people interact with one another on a regular basis, over a long period of time, this seems to have beneficial impacts on the community as a whole. One term that describes the networks that get built through this interaction is “social capital.” Communities with stronger networks and higher social capital have higher rates of economic growth, lower levels of unemployment and lower crime rates. Residents are physically healthier and the communities are more resilient and better able to deal with natural disasters and other crises.

-
- **Improved student achievement and well-being.** We know that when parents, students and other family members are fully engaged in student learning, this results in higher test scores, lower dropout rates, safer schools and many other positive impacts on student achievement and well-being. Clearly, these outcomes benefit not only students and their families, but society as a whole.

Engagement is a Two-way Street

One of the most common mistakes people make is to assume that engagement is all about speaking and not about listening. Engagement opportunities are not just for officials to inform or “educate” citizens, or for citizens to instruct or complain to officials. A good system for engagement should help everyone become more informed, educated and ready to collaborate.

WHEN IS ENGAGEMENT REALLY IMPORTANT?

Ideally, public engagement is always ongoing through a variety of structures and avenues. However, there are some situations that call for more intensive, targeted engagement efforts.

Engagement is particularly important if:

The issue or decision is particularly complex or controversial. Successful engagement will help the community understand issues better, help defuse tensions and make it more likely that people can work together.

The issue or decision will impact a large group of people. A stakeholder is anyone who can affect, or who will be affected by, your project. More intensive, interactive types of engagement are helpful if you are still in the process of defining the stakeholder group or if you know there are many different kinds of stakeholders.

Adapted from “Community Engagement: Guidelines for Excellence,” North American Association for Environmental Education, https://naaee.org/sites/default/files/community_engagement_-_guidelines_for_excellence.pdf

TYPES OF ENGAGEMENT:

Conventional, Thick and Thin

There are three kinds of engagement happening in most communities today. “Conventional” engagement is by far the most common type, but “thick” and “thin” engagement are both on the rise.



Conventional engagement is what happens in most public meetings today. Citizens and officials are separated from one another, there are no breakouts or small-group discussions and citizens have brief opportunities, typically limited to two or three minutes, to address the whole group.



Thick engagement is more intensive, informed and deliberative. Most of the action happens in small-group discussion. Organizers assemble large and diverse numbers of people; give participants chances to share their experiences; present them with a range of views or policy options; and encourage action and change at multiple levels.



Thin engagement is faster, easier and more convenient. It includes a range of activities that allow people to express their opinions, make choices or affiliate themselves with a particular group or cause. It is less likely to build personal or community connections. One way of summarizing the difference is to say that thick engagement empowers small groups and thin engagement empowers individuals.

Thick participation opportunities are more likely to be face-to-face and thin ones are more likely to happen online. However, many thick processes include both online and face-to-face elements, and some examples of thin participation, such as signing a petition, certainly existed long before the internet.

Thick, thin and conventional engagement have different strengths and limitations, and they complement each other well. All of them could be part of an effective “multichannel” system for engagement.

Unfortunately, most communities do not treat engagement as a regular, sustained part of community life. People think of it mainly as a way to make big decisions and big plans—and because those things are usually done in conventional ways, residents often do not think positively about engagement. Taking stock of how engagement is working—



Thick



Thin



Conventional



Thick



Thin



TAKING STOCK OF HOW ENGAGEMENT HAPPENS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Any attempt to improve public engagement in a community should begin with some questions on how engagement is working today. Much of the engagement focuses either on school issues or on local government issues. Here are some questions to consider in each of those areas.

(The list on p. 5 of criteria for productive engagement may be helpful for thinking about these questions.)

Engagement in Schools and Education Issues

1. What kinds of engagement opportunities are available for students, families and other residents in the school district? Are they thick or thin? (or a combination of both?)
2. Where do people engage with each other outside the official engagement opportunities—in diners, at the general store or in other places? How are those conversations different?
3. How effective are the public meetings and other official interactions between citizens and district leaders, such as the superintendent and school board? What is working well? What isn't working well?
4. How effective are the public meetings and other official interactions between citizens and school leaders such as the principal? What is working well? What isn't working well?
5. Do the people who are getting engaged reflect and represent the full diversity of the parents or community?
6. How well are parent-teacher associations, school councils and other parent groups working?
7. Are people engaging on school and education issues online? If so, how well is that working?
8. What are some ideas for improving engagement in schools and education? How can you help?

Engagement in Local Government Issues

1. What kinds of engagement opportunities are available for residents in planning and zoning processes?
2. Where do people engage with each other outside the official engagement opportunities—in diners, at the general store or in other places? How are those conversations different?
3. How effective are the official public meetings on land use decisions and other public issues?
4. What kinds of engagement opportunities are available for voters in budgeting processes?
5. Do the people who are getting engaged reflect and represent the full diversity of the people affected?
6. How well are neighborhood associations, homeowners' associations and other grassroots groups working?
7. Are people engaging on local government issues online? If so, how well is that working?
8. What are some ideas for improving engagement in local government? How can you help?

How is Engagement Working?

More questions:

- Are there segments of the community that have historically been ignored or excluded?
- How effective is the community in engaging the full range of residents, including newcomers, long-time residents, immigrants, seniors, young people, young families, people of all income levels and business owners?
- How well are young leaders, such as teens and 20-somethings, supported, and is their potential being tapped effectively?
- Is school and government data available online or at a public location and how effectively does it complement and inform public engagement?
- How much is the school system spending—in money and/or in staff time—on public engagement annually? How much is local government spending?
- How are engagement activities and initiatives evaluated and assessed?
- What are the legal mandates and restrictions on public engagement? (See <http://bit.ly/ceillegal> for more on legal frameworks for engagement.)
- Do school and local government staff have the skills, cultural awareness and organizational support to work productively with citizens?

BUILDING BLOCKS FOR STRONGER SYSTEMS OF ENGAGEMENT

What kinds of engagement activities does the public want? Where should those activities take place? How could leaders help initiate and/or support the activities?

Enabling Family Decision Making

- Student-led parent-teacher conferences
- Student-centered learning teams
- Online tools
- Opportunities to interact with government and school officials around questions and concerns

Enabling Community Decision Making

- More participatory public meetings (school boards, planning commissions, budgeting)
- Participatory Budgeting
- More participatory homeowners associations, PTAs and other grassroots groups
- Youth councils
- Advisory committees that engage residents

Encouraging Public Work

- Large-scale volunteering activities
- Coordination among organizations and groups that recruit and support volunteers
- Crowdfunding and mini-grant programs
- Apps and platforms for teams and tasks

Gathering Input and Data

- Crowdsourcing exercises
- Apps for identifying problems with physical infrastructure
- Surveys, polls, interviews and focus groups

Discussing and Connecting

- Regular social events
- Local online forums, including social media
- Welcoming public spaces

Disseminating Information

- School and local government websites
- Dashboards and apps for school and government data
- Serious games
- Partnering with media organizations
- Interactive maps

Each of the six categories may be necessary, at least to some extent, for any good system of engagement. At first glance, this might seem overwhelming. However, many of the settings and tools for these activities already exist, at least to some degree, in every community. Look at the chart on the previous page and ask:

- Are these the right categories to be thinking about? Are there others?
- What kinds of activities are already working well in each category?

Some groups, like commissions, parent groups, homeowners' associations and local online forums, are central and versatile—they could potentially play a vital role in all six categories. But for most of the leaders in charge of these existing groups, supporting engagement more effectively will require changes—sometimes significant ones—in the way they operate and how they think about engagement.

TOOLS AND STRUCTURES TO CONSIDER

Once you have a vision for what kind of engagement system you want, the next step is to think about the specific tools, strategies and structures you could use to make that vision a reality.

1. Guidelines for more productive public meetings.

Official public meetings of school boards, select boards and other public bodies can work more smoothly when they use strategies to make those meetings more participatory, transparent and effective. Public officials can:

- Adopt a small-group format for some topics. Depending on state and local law, small-group formats can be used as part of the main meeting or as a separate session before or after the formal proceedings. Public officials can take part or simply observe, though active participation is usually more valuable.
- Hold the meetings in places other than a town hall. Allow different community groups and institutions to host these meetings and invite them to recruit attendees from their networks.
- Televisе or live-stream the meetings and allow people to participate online or by phone. Televised community conversations can reach a broad audience and participation can be increased by allowing questions, comments or poll responses to be given by phone, social media or text message. Crowdsourcing techniques can be used to prioritize questions and comments.
- Change the room layout. Rather than classroom-style with officials facing participants, consider a circle of chairs, small groups at tables or seating set up in a chevron-shape so more people can see each other. Changing the physical setup so that public officials are not removed from citizens sends an important signal about the value of public participation.
- Use a moderator or facilitator. A skilled moderator who is trusted and respected by all parties can facilitate and improve the interactions between board or council members and the public by ensuring that conflicts are addressed productively and all voices are heard.
- Frame issues broadly and provide balanced information. Policy decisions are often framed in very narrow terms, without an adequate description of the data, assumptions and broad goals that brought the public body to the particular decision. Without this background information, citizens (and sometimes public officials and employees) can lose sight of what is being decided and why. Make this information available online and at the meeting.
- Be clear with yourself and with participants about the purpose of engagement, and match the right tool to the purpose. Adopt a protocol or framework (see #4, on next page) that helps public officials decide when an issue requires a broader, more intensive, more participatory process before a final decision is made. If this framework is itself produced through some sort of public participation process, it will help set clearer expectations for how people will be involved in governance.
- Follow up and report back. Public boards and councils should always report on how citizen input was used, the reasons behind officials' decisions and the ways that people can get involved in the issue in the future. Reporting back should be done in a range of ways, including social media, other online tools and face-to-face meetings.

2. An engagement committee or commission. A local engagement commission or advisory board can help advise public institutions on the design, implementation and evaluation of public engagement. The charter for this body could direct it to accomplish one or more of the following responsibilities:

- Develop and propose a multi-year plan to guide public engagement activities, programs and policies.
- Develop guidelines and policy recommendations for public institutions.
- Provide advice and recommendations regarding the implementation of engagement guidelines and practices.
- Review process evaluation results to provide advice and recommendations regarding continuous improvement of engagement policies and practices.
- Provide an annual report regarding the status of public engagement in the community.

3. Resources for revitalizing grassroots groups and informing community conversations.

There are many groups, clubs and organizations—and even just places people gather, like diners, bars and general stores—that have great potential as part of the ground floor of local democracy. In some places there are neighborhood, homeowners and parent-teacher associations. However, these groups face several difficulties that can limit their ability to effectively impact schools and communities. First, some of these groups follow conventional engagement formats such as Robert’s Rules of Order, which can limit dialogue and creativity. Second, recruitment efforts are often minimal, which means the usual suspects turn out again and again, and meetings lack diversity and a critical mass. Participants are seldom provided with opportunities to share information and stories, let alone to make choices or take action. These groups can be revitalized in several ways:

- Training programs that provide recruitment, facilitation and organizational skills.
- How-to materials that reinforce those skills.
- Policies that delineate the role(s) of these groups in policymaking—on what kinds of issues and decisions will the association be asked to advise the school board, town council and other elected and appointed officials? What will the process be for those interactions? How will their opinions be incorporated into final decisions?
- New meeting formats that are more social, child-friendly and fun.

4. A public engagement protocol to help public officials and employees decide what kinds of decisions and situations warrant citizen involvement, what level or kind of engagement would be appropriate and what they might accomplish by engaging. The protocol should describe potential engagement goals and then select the appropriate actions to meet their goals. Examples of possible engagement goals include:

- Informing the public.
- Gathering public input, feedback and preferences.
- Helping citizens generate new ideas.
- Supporting volunteerism and citizen-driven problem solving.
- Making a policy decision.
- Developing a budget or a plan.

In addition to helping officials and employees set their engagement goals, the protocol should help them understand the goals that residents might bring to the process, and how—by adapting the process and/or by clarifying expectations—they can ensure that the process or projects meets the goals of both “engagers” and “engaged.” See Appendix for a chart that suggests engagement tactics to meet each goal.

5. Guidelines for working with online forums.

School groups, homeowners associations and other groups are more likely to succeed if they work with, or establish, local online forums that connect residents who live in the same area or parents whose children attend the same school. These forums have spread dramatically in the last ten years, starting with simple listservs, then Facebook groups, then slightly more sophisticated platforms (such as Front Porch Forum and NextDoor). They combine the convenience of the internet with the power of local face-to-face relationships. Members of these online forums may talk about what the school board did, or what the mayor said, but they also ask questions like “Who has a plumber they can recommend?” or “Has anyone seen my lost cat?” People stay involved in these virtual spaces for many reasons: they are convenient, they allow for interaction, they deepen and complement face-to-face relationships, they are adaptable by the participants and they give people a powerful sense of membership. However, these simple formats are not designed for deliberation. In fact, Front Porch Forum moderators occasionally have to shut off discussion threads that become too heated, suggesting that interested participants call a meeting. As with face-to-face associations, these forums are more likely to thrive if all users understand basic ground rules, and if the people organizing them have access to training, how-to materials, and policies that define the relationship between the forum and the official decision-makers.

6. Resources for school redesign and student-centered learning. To fulfill the potential of student-centered learning, the system of engagement should include activities and structures that work inside schools. UP for Learning has been working with high school youth-adult teams to help them build public understanding and support for student-centered learning since the inception of Act 77. They have a host of tools and dialogue strategies to help participants understand the basics of both flexible pathways and proficiency-based learning. They also have a variety of activities to explore both why schools are changing, and what a redesigned school looks and sounds like. These can be found on their website at www.upforlearning.org/initiatives/communicating-school-redesign. (See “Shaping Our Future Together” link from this page).

7. A public participation ordinance that defines engagement, describes the principles that make it productive and meaningful, and gives public officials and staff the backing to try new forms of engagement that live up to those principles. A model ordinance (<http://bit.ly/mpplegal>) with these components was developed by a coalition that included representatives of the National League of Cities, American Bar Association, International City/County Management Association, International Municipal Lawyers Association and Deliberative Democracy Consortium. The ordinance must be in accordance with state open meetings laws; however, it can include more specific guidelines in areas where open meeting laws are hard to interpret. For instance, since most open meetings laws predate widespread Internet use, applying them to situations in online engagement is difficult. A local ordinance could include language that allows public officials to communicate with constituents, and with one another, in an online forum as long as that communication is documented and immediately open to the public. Many online forums and some social media platforms already have that kind of instantaneous, verbatim transparency built into the way they operate; because they make this information so accessible and searchable, they may already be more transparent than conventional public meetings. Ordinances can also allow for small-group discussion as part of public meetings (such as this example: <http://bit.ly/calabasas1>).

8. A public engagement resolution that school and government officials can use to declare their commitment to productive public participation. These kinds of declarations can help selectboards, school boards, planning commissions and other official entities show that they value the roles that citizens can play in public life. In most cases, these are non-binding statements. However, especially if they are accompanied by some of the other measures on this list, they can be effective for showing that officials value and expect productive contributions by citizens to local governance.

9. Job descriptions for professionals supporting engagement. Many communities have people working in local governments or school systems with job titles that include terms like “public engagement” or “citizen involvement.” In many institutions, those sorts of terms are listed under the broad heading of “communications.” But because engagement is usually so ill-defined, and because the profession of public engagement practice is so underdeveloped, the people serving in those roles are often unaware of the kinds of ideas and processes described in this document. Furthermore:

- Designating a single public employee or department as the center for engagement may create bottlenecks and give the impression that all other public employees are free from having to interact with citizens. Some of the best examples of engaged local governments (such as this small town in Spain: <http://bit.ly/guardspain>) have been able to create connections between citizens and a wide variety of city staff.
- Given that a system for engagement is more likely to be successful if it is supported by a set of organizations rather than one institution, it may be more beneficial for engagement staffers to be housed outside government as part of a cross-sector coalition.

Job descriptions that describe the skills necessary to organize and support engagement and that establish performance benchmarks to be used in professional development and promotion, can be beneficial no matter which organization is hiring engagement staff. One example is the job description created by the City of Santa Rosa, California (<http://bit.ly/santarose>).

10. A map of civic assets can help communities assess their current civic infrastructure and envision better systems for engagement. It is also an area where new technologies can be particularly beneficial. Interactive, “wiki” maps can encompass a wide range of local information, including opportunities for engagement. They can allow users to: map organizations and institutions, such as nonprofits, schools or congregations, in relationship to needs in the community; overlay community indicators such as

unemployment rates, housing costs, health insurance, income and poverty; assemble a centralized directory of services and volunteer opportunities; map specific problems like potholes or playgrounds that require maintenance; view publicly available financial information on community organizations; map schools and youth programs; and track quantifiable program outcome indicators, such as graduation rates or the number of families served; and connect with a national clearinghouse of resources. One example is LocalWiki; the version of the technology used in Saranac Lake, New York (<http://bit.ly/saranaclake>). In addition to their capacity for illustrating civic infrastructure, the creation of these maps—since they invite contributions and edits from citizens—can in themselves be an effective form of public engagement.

11. An annual Participatory Budgeting process.

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a type of engagement in which citizens decide together how to spend public money from a special fund. The process typically begins in the fall with a forum at which people generate project ideas. Then people form teams to research and refine the most promising ideas, often working with public officials, staff and experts. In the spring there is an idea fair where the teams promote their ideas, followed by a community-wide vote on how the money should be allocated among the projects. See www.participatory-budgeting.org for more details.

12. Citizen advisory boards that engage, rather than simply represent.

Citizen advisory bodies (CABs) include advisory boards, committees and commissions. Most CABs work in purely representative ways: members make decisions based on what they think is right and what they think citizens want, rather than engaging citizens directly. With the aid of training, how-to resources and changes in their charters, CABs could engage citizens directly through thick and thin forms of engagement. With this shift, they could strengthen the accountability of officials while also creating responsive, two-way communication between government institutions and the community.

APPENDIX

Public Engagement Tactics and Goals

TACTICS	GOALS					
	Inform the Public	Gather Input, Feedback & Preferences	Generate New Ideas & Info	Support Volunteerism & Problem-solving	Make a Public Decision	Create a Plan or Budget
Surveys and Polls		YES			YES with other tactics	YES with other tactics
Focus Groups		YES			YES with other tactics	YES with other tactics
Online Problem— Reporting Platforms (such as www.seeclickfix.com)			YES	YES with other tactics		YES with other tactics
Idea Contests			YES	YES		YES with other tactics
Crowdfunding and Minigrants (such as www.ioby.org)			YES	YES		YES with other tactics
Serious Games	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES with other tactics	YES with other tactics
Asset Mapping	YES		YES	YES	YES with other tactics	YES with other tactics
Local Online Networks	YES	YES	YES with other tactics	YES	YES with other tactics	YES with other tactics
Charrettes and other Collaborative Planning Processes (see www.pps.org)			YES	YES		YES
Participatory Budgeting (see www.participatorybudgeting.org)	YES		YES	YES	YES with other tactics	YES
Study Circles and Deliberative Forums (see www.everyday-democracy.org)	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

Adapted from Public Participation for 21st Century Democracy, Nabatchi and Leighninger 2015.



Public Agenda helps build a democracy that works for everyone. By elevating a diversity of voices, forging common ground, and improving dialogue and collaboration among leaders and communities, Public Agenda fuels progress on critical issues, including education, health care and community engagement. Founded in 1975, Public Agenda is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization based in New York City.

Find Public Agenda online at PublicAgenda.org, on Facebook at facebook.com/PublicAgenda and on Twitter at [@PublicAgenda](https://twitter.com/PublicAgenda).

Contact: PE@publicagenda.org • tel: 212.686.6610