

Innovations in Public Engagement
Low-income Focus Group (Paterson, NJ)
January 21, 2016

Date: January 21, 6:00-7:30 PM

Location: Hamilton Club, 32 Church St, Paterson

Staff Facilitators: Charles Brown, Miriam Salerno

Other staff in attendance: Lois Goldman

Major Takeaways:

1. **Citizen engagement is high:** Every participant in the room has been to public meetings and actively participates in their community. There are strong Paterson roots and a strong sense of community pride/ownership among the participants. Participants also expressed a strong desire to effect change – especially as it relates to their kids or young people in the community. Participants also appreciated when meetings are educational, and look to community forums as a way to educate themselves. Location and time were cited as the most important factors influencing meeting attendance, though women also cited childcare as important if they had young children. All participants said they would stop at a pop-up kiosk to talk to someone about transportation issues.
2. **Social media is used to follow elected officials and specific issues.** Nearly all of the participants use social media. Many of them interact with their councilman, elected officials, and government programs on social media. Participants will follow a transportation agency if there is a specific long term issue they want to follow to use it like a 511 service.
3. **Connection to community matters more than race.** Participants agreed that it was important that outreach be conducted by someone who understands their community and the issues that affect Paterson residents. Knowledge of the community mattered more than race. A facilitator has instant credibility when he/she identifies as part of the community, or comes from a similar background.
4. **Keep advertisements simple and highlight community assets.** Participants did not like advertisements when the text was too small, the flyer was too busy, and when the essential information, including what, where, and when, is missing. It is important that a flyer identifies what the meeting is about and what are the activities. Participants liked when there were multiple options for participation. A few participants mentioned that a flyer should reflect community pride with photos and images of the city's "majesty." They did not like when a flyer limited their role with a header that only asked for their comments.
5. **A vision is needed for 2040.** Participants feel like 2040 is really far away and suggested relating 2040 to the future of their kids or youth in the community would be an effective way to engage residents. Some participants also suggested that they are more likely to participate if there is something tangible, such as a vision in writing or drawing advance of an upcoming meeting.

6. **Advice for NJTPA:** Participants in the group suggested that they best way to engage people who would otherwise not participate would be to pay them.
7. **Lessons from recruitment:** Participants heard about this focus group from a wide range of places. Some saw the posting in the Paterson Times (either website or via twitter), others heard about it from various community groups, including a nutrition center, a family support organization, and a one-stop career center.

Participants:

Name	Race	Gender	Occupation	City of residence
Miguel Diaz	Hispanic	Male	Supervisor for Passaic County Govt	Paterson
Kashann Stewart	Black	Female	Sub-teacher	Paterson
Wayne Witherspoon	Black	Male	Teacher, Part-time police officer	Paterson
Fredric Allen	Black	Male	Sales Manager	Paterson
Tanya Gray	Black	Female	Program Manager - Art of Essex County	Paterson
Steven Boyd	Black	Male	Construction	Paterson
Veronica Davis	Black	Female	Unemployed case manager	Paterson
Sury Sanchez	Hispanic	Female	Judiciary	Paterson
Jeanette Thompson	Black	Female	Retired	Paterson
Evelyn Torres	Hispanic	Female		
Rebecca Nelson	Black	Female	Retired	Paterson
George Nelson	Black	Male	Retired	Paterson

Discussion and Responses:

How did you hear about the meeting tonight?

- Nj.com (2)
- Employment center – career one-stop
- North Jersey backyard?
- Family support organization
- Nutrition center in Paterson (2)
- Northjersey.com Twitter feed
- Paterson press
- I’m the ED of the Paterson Habitat Homeowners Association and heard about it there

What kind of Transportation do you normally use?

- I lease my vehicle, but sometimes it's not reliable, so I take public transportation
- I'm fortunate to have a vehicle right now, but because parking is sometimes inconvenient I might use public transportation
- I normally drive
- It's good that we have a transportation program for seniors because I can't drive at night, so transportation is very important for us
- I have a vehicle, but at times I do take public transportation
- I do have a vehicle, but I take public transportation to get to work
- My car broke down, so take everything from the bus to a lot of carpool apps like Lyft and Uber
- I drive my car everywhere. I'm looking to get another car by the end of the year. I have a goal of getting 200,000 miles on my current car, which I've never done before. I also drive Monday through Wednesday back and forth to Newark. But I'm a strong advocate of not drinking and driving, so if I want to party I'll do Lyft 3-5 times a month.
- I drive my own car
- I drove my girlfriend's car tonight, but I usually use NJT or the dollar bus that goes up and down the street
- I live and walk the streets of Paterson; I'm a true Patersonian

Word Association (12:20)

- ***Walkable***
 - (inaudible)
- ***Public transit***
 - Buses, train, which one I gotta use if I have to get somewhere
- ***Capital investment***
 - Money
- ***Complete streets***
 - In what meaning specifically?
 - That could encompass a lot of things, so I just want to know what you mean
 - Lack thereof
- ***Livable***
 - Balance between work and your extracurricular activities
- ***Pedestrian***
 - Respect
- ***Disabled***
 - I'm lost right now – I can't think of anything
- ***Public hearing***
 - I think about a council hearing, things going on in Paterson
- ***Community development***

- I sure hope they'll do something with those highways
- **Crime**
 - High, too high
 - I work in the court system
- **Juvenile**
 - I think of minors
 - I've been in Paterson for 3 years so I think of disadvantaged youth
- **Senior citizens**
 - Elderly, and maybe the care that they're not getting
 - Retirement

We're going to talk about different kinds of ways you can be involved in the transportation planning process and what may appeal to you. My first question is: have you ever been to a public meeting or a public workshop to talk about an issue in your community? How many have been to a public meeting? (17:00)

- [Every participant raised their hand]
- I used to go to the town council meetings with my dad, and they talk about a variety of issues, anything from transportation to crime to overtime pay issues to budgets coming up short, people stealing from schools, etc.
- I was at a public meeting about transportation. About 5 years ago there was a movement to try to bring light rail to Paterson from Newark, and one of the stations that was foreseen to be used was at Madison Street and there was a meeting to develop what that station would look like and they would buy the surrounding houses and they would create a new walking neighborhood. There would be places where you could buy souvenirs, a candy store. And that movement died, practically. Two years ago there was another big development and they were going to bring that back and we're thinking that maybe in 10 years we're going to have that station there again. I think now that the federal government, the state, the community, the city, Passaic, Harrison, and Newark are maybe going to get involved to bring this project back. I think that would be a great thing for us. I learned a lot in that meeting, and that's the reason why I came to this meeting.
- I've been to public meetings at the Madison Avenue Church, which I'm a member of. They used to have meetings on certain nights of the week when people from the public and policemen would come. They always had a big problem on that 10th Avenue area, with people standing around, things staying open until certain hours, and you know, drug things. We had meetings to discuss putting up lights, mobile policemen in the area, stuff like that.
 - *What did you like most about the meeting?*
 - I liked when we could deal with the policemen, and they were discussing the problems, and it was very educational.
- *Who has been to five or more public meetings?*
 - [7 participants raised their hands].

What factors influenced your interest in going to the meeting? (21:50)

- Making a difference, maybe my suggestion would help inform a better route or something like that
- I went to a meeting about homelessness in Passaic County, and it gave some people like clients, staff, and myself an opportunity to share why they became homeless. A lot of people think of homeless people and think they're homeless because they want to be homeless, or because of something drug related. A lot of times it's because people are a paycheck away from being homeless, and it's to get back on your feet just takes so much to secure housing. I went to the meeting because it was personal.
- It was curiosity mostly. It was about drug abuse among teenagers, so it was curiosity.
- I have been to 8 meetings, some of which I had no choice about. The problem was I worked at a hospital, and sometimes you'd have patients who were put on one-to-one. It so happened this patient was an alcoholic, and I was his care for that day and he had a meeting and I had to be with them. When you're taking care of those kinds of patients, you must be in reach at all times, so I went to a couple of those AA meetings with him.
- I like to follow the educational trail, because when I had young children, I would attend the PTA meetings, association, and now that I'm retired I still go to grandparents' programs, to learn from other grandparents, and it's important these days to realize that a lot of grandparents are parents now too, raising young children. In the senior group we learn and we have people come in to teach us about Alzheimer's disease, different health related things, how to take medicine, medical care, falling, and issues affecting seniors. Like her I'm just being nosy, I like to be nosy and learn about what's going on in my neighborhood, and I go to elementary schools and things like that. I know my councilmen and I try to tap in with them also.
- I've been to substance abuse programs because my daughter was going through it, more for support, and to learn how I could help her deal it, how I can help her deal with her issues.
- About 20 years ago I was employed at the Passaic County Detention Center, so when they were going to close the Detention Center, we were fighting to keep it open, so I was going to council meetings in Paterson and Newark, just to try to keep it open. In my personal opinion, they've already made their decision. They want to hear what you have to say, but they already made their decision behind the scene, so it's really just all political. I'm not gonna say I feel that way about all public meetings, but I'm just saying the ones I've been to here in the city of Paterson, because of the council people here, it's too political. It's not what you know, it's who you know.
- Anything that's going to affect me, and my life and where I'm living, and anything that's for the greater good of the community, where I can go to show some support, and push them, to hopefully get some results.
- Because of my positions in the public sector, about 90% of the jobs I've ever had have been in the public sector, I've been forced to go to meetings. I was in a meeting with this gentlemen, [gestures to another participant, who is the president of Eastside Neighborhood Assn, ESNA] and we had a meeting, so I've been forced to, but not in a bad way, but I went to public meetings.

- (28:20) I'd go to a meeting that had to do with anything in my neighborhood - where I live, where I do my work, where I do my service – because if it affects my neighborhood it affects me. I understand that crime, all of those issues – if they happen to you, they happen to me. If it happens to you I want to be there to prepare, learn, and educate myself and look for ways to avoid that. You have to be part of the solution. You cannot stay home and say “that’s not my problem, that’s his problem.” His problem is everybody’s problem. You have to be involved. I always go to any hearing that has to do with safety and education.
- I had to think about it, but long before I became the president of ESNA, you know that Route 20 area, down by the Bank of America? That wasn’t always there. I live right across the street from that area, so 10 years ago I went to a meeting where we were fighting against that strip mall, and looking back I think the strip mall is a good idea now, but at the time they were proposing some quality of life issues that I think shouldn’t have been there, like a strip club, but the quality of business is better there now. That’s the last time that I’d been to a meeting that I had an interest in and didn’t necessarily have to go to for work. My house is about five houses from the highway, and even now with the Bank of America there, on a Friday it looks like a parking lot. We thought there was going to be an issue with noise, just quality of life issues. When I look at it now, that was kind of blown out of proportion, and it’s a good thing that that strip mall is there. But I went to that meeting because we thought there were going to be major issues.
- Like I said, I’m a true Patersonian, and being raised up in the Alexander Hamilton Projects, the good times were way back then, but it turned. So I went back, and I started public hearings to help the people and young kids in our neighborhood, so I started sponsoring young groups, like basketball. That’s how I started getting into working with politicians, and I’ve been working with politicians for 40 years if anybody knows me. Then, after that, it was housing. People that were out here working every day, the banks just would never consider us for housing. So I got involved with affordable housing, and helping groups, and really just individuals, we formed together, went forums, we went to protest, so I’ve been to a lot of protests and public hearings. We helped over 300+ families in the City of Paterson with affordable housing, in 30 years, so that’s fantastic. We’ve only had maybe 4 bankruptcies out of all those families. It’s in things like this that I feel bad. We really need more people to come out and do public hearings.
- [in response] We’re a better city because of it.
- The reason I like going to public hearings was because I’m from Paterson all my life, and Paterson already has a reputation, and I don’t think we need another reputation from like Bergen county, because Bergen county thinks Paterson is their kids’ problem because of the drug problem, so they see their kids coming over here to buy drugs as a Paterson problem. Just like, you can go back to the 70s and 80s, when Paterson was blaming this problem on 116th & Morningside [in Harlem], you see the cycle? But you can’t stop a person from getting what his body needs to feel good. But this is my city, I love my city, and if I see something wrong I’m going to speak up.

Raise your hand if one of the following things would influence you to come to the meeting or not.
(35:22)

- ***Food and refreshments?***
 - It helps
 - [4 said yes]
 - If the meeting is like 5 hours or something, it helps
- ***Childcare availability***
 - [Most women said yes, it would affect or would have affected their decision when they had young children]
- ***Location or proximity***
 - [9 said yes]
- ***Time***
 - [Majority said yes]
- ***Being invited by someone you know. If yes, what do you mean by that? Why does that make a difference?***
 - I was invited by a support group that I attend
 - It does matter if it's a coworker, friend, family. If it's important to them and they're close to me, it most likely would be important to me.
 - I don't want to let that person down if they invite me, so the least I can do is show up. I don't want them to ask why I didn't show up. And if it's an issue that's important to me and there will be voting, then I can't complain if I didn't show up and give my input.

Does it matter to you that I am an African American person asking you questions?

- [All said No]
- No, as long as they are intelligent questions
- Someone who identifies as being from here makes it a lot easier, with all due respect. I would say, they're trying to get a perspective of our city, but do they live here? Do they go through the day to day struggle of living here, do they understand the traffic patterns and the roads and where they go? I always feel like people who work in the city should live in the city, and it's very important. It's less about race – [to Miriam] If you told me you lived here twenty years, then you know what? You got instant credibility.
- [to Charles] If you told me you lived in Paterson, it wouldn't have made much of a difference, but if you told me you were raised in Paterson and I saw you sitting there and how far you've come, that would make me feel good.
- It's inspirational to see the career you've gotten in to
- I work with youth, and to have you sitting there as an African American doing this forum, working as a teacher, a speaker, who went to college, it's good for them to see.
- I feel bad sometimes because these days we're not supposed to be talking about race and color issues. If you went to school, good for you. It's not for me. It's a good thing that Rutgers sent you and her because they know what kind of people they're going to see here. But when I see that before we go into a meeting or a place and they say "we're going to send Miguel

because he's Latino," or "we're going to send Susie because she's African American," I think, "no! we're going to send Miguel because he knows the issues." When I see those kinds of questions I feel insulted because we're supposed to be open.

- I think it's important to understand that he may have a similar background as us so he can empathize where we're coming from. Someone from a rural background might not understand how a city works, so they can't understand. If she told me she had lived in Paterson for 20 years, regardless of race, that adds legitimacy to her being here.
- When we go to school, when they play basketball, baseball, or football, they don't see color. At that level, color doesn't exist. We see color maybe because we aren't educated.
- [in response] But why aren't there more African American managers and coaches? They may not see color on the playing field, and they're happy to have African American players, but do they trust us with those management jobs?

Think about a family member or a friend who doesn't attend any public meetings whatsoever. Imagine that person – they refuse to go to public meetings. What can we do to influence that person to go to a meeting? What would it take to get that person at a meeting? (45:00)

- Pay them
- How much?
 - Depends on amount of time, travel time
- If the meeting is an hour and a half, how much money would it take?
 - \$40-\$50
 - It's important to take into account that all of us tonight heard about this through a link. I saw it on Facebook
 - A lot of us go to New York and we pay these exorbitant tolls, \$14 or so, to get to the city. The Port Authority traditionally, historically, has had their meetings during the day. Why is that an issue? Because when you talk about having a public meeting, we can't make those meetings! It's money, but it's also marketing. That's why this is a good deal because it's in the evening, it's not at like 3 in the afternoon. That's why I'm piggybacking on the comment on time. I just had to point out the issue with Port Authority because it's been going on for years. That's the problem – the public sector is supposed to be serving the community and it's supposed to be for the general good. What city council do you know that has a meeting in the afternoon? None! They would be voted out of office tomorrow. It has to be in the evening.
 - Time is the most important thing.

Look at the flyers. Each of you will be assigned a flyer, and I want you to take about a minute or so and ask yourself: what do you think the meeting is about? If the meeting were in Paterson, would you be interested in attending that meeting based on this flyer? Will the meeting be interactive or not? Would you contact the host agency for more information if you could not attend that meeting? What do you like best about the flyer, or what do you find confusing? (49:00)

Flyer #1

[first participant]

- It seems to be about alternate service routes for buses, a plan to come up with alternate transportation service
- Yes, I'd be interested in attending. I'd probably attend the evening meeting since there are multiple options.
- I would hope that they'd have an outline of what they planned to do to establish additional services, but I can't tell what kind of activities are planned
- I would probably call and ask what areas they were planning on doing the survey in, and if it pertains to me, or somewhere I'm traveling, then yes, I would attend.
- I like the flyer because it drew my attention because it's in color, it has the bus on there, it caught my eye. That's what I always try to do is make a flyer that catches someone's eye

[second participant]

- Way too much going on.
- To catch my attention, it has to have a main line with big bold print that will catch my attention and have me continue reading, but they have so many different paragraphs going on. There's nothing really, I mean they have a bus from like 1920 on here. *[other participant: A Rosa Parks bus!]* It's like one of those really old, old buses. It doesn't catch my attention. I would probably walk right by it

Flyer #2

[first participant]

- I guess it's about how to strategize how to get from one place to another
- To me it's not saying much, just talking about meeting from 5:30-7:30 and the Mayor's going to speak. It seems like more likely that you have to come to the meeting to see what they're talking about.
- It doesn't grab my attention, but it's in Richmond, VA and I know a little about Richmond and they need more transportation down there because I go there a lot.
- I really didn't like it. It's not really saying anything.

[second participant]

- I like the fact that the photos play a part in it. When I look at this it gets my interest because it looks like they're trying to connect different areas, from rural to suburbs to city areas. However, it's a little messy – that background makes it cloudy. If I was just walking past this, I'd be struggling, because right now I have my reading glasses, but this is the only part I would catch. I

would catch the pictures, and when I got to the fine print it wouldn't stick with me, it wouldn't hold my interest to follow up on it.

Flyer #3 (55:00)

- I like that it's colorful
- It's something about roads, transportation, something about the city
- Yes, it interests me
- Yes, I'm likely to contact the agency for more information
- I like the flyer because it shows me that we're moving towards a future in transportation

Flyer #4

- When I look at this, it's the North Jersey Transportation Planning Committee, and I have to say as a student of history that one of the shining examples of the Eisenhower Administration is the interesting Highway Transportation Act, which was a law created in 1954, and it brought the nation's highways together, as we know them now. The Turnpike, Route 8 – it's essential, it's the basis of how we travel and our destinations today. It's the hallmark of who we are not just as people in our state but basically as a society. It's a shining example of the presence. I say all that to say that the NJTPA, without that we don't have all this, and planning is the most essential thing that we can talk about when we talk about infrastructure in our state, because infrastructure has everything to do with how we travel as a people, it has everything to do with jobs, it has everything to do with who we are as a people.
- I like the pictures because it represents the majesty of the city. I like that. I work in Newark, I socialize in Newark, I love Newark. I have no problems with Newark. The problem is that I want that majesty of those pictures to be bigger. It should be bigger. The first picture if I'm not mistaken is downtown Newark, and that's the courthouse, that tall building right there, it looks like the courthouse if I'm not mistaken, but I shouldn't have to guess that. Those pictures should represent the majesty of the city.

Flyer #5

- Simple, plain, doesn't really catch my eye
- I feel like the wording, like "we need your comments" is limiting your role a little bit, instead of "we need your help." If you want someone to feel included, you want to make them feel like they have an actual voice and they can actually participate. Instead of "we want your commentary," it should be "we want you participate and join in with us," so it will make them feel like, you have a choice, or at least you can say something, rather than just having commentary.
- I like how they try to put the smart phone code on it

Flyer #6

- It doesn't really give me anything, it's not really giving me too much information. I think it's asking for my opinions – would I like to get there on my own or would I like to take the Amtrak, or would I like to ride a bike? I think I would call to get more information. I would go to the website. It's confusing, but I think it's just asking me a question: how do you want to get there? Have your say. So I'm thinking would I like to use public transportation, or would I like to get there on my own? That's what I think it's asking.
- The color is ok, I'm not too keen on it.
- [others] That's a terrible color
- [others] I love orange!

Flyer #7

- It's got nice colors and it's says we're moving forward. It's talking about moving forward and transportation – buses, cars.
- The year 2040 seems like a long time from now. I don't know if I'm going to be here.
- If tonight's meeting were about 2040 I would attend because I'd like to hear what you have to say.

Flyer #8 (1:02:30)

- I think it's about transportation, biking
- It tells me where, how, what, when, time. It's giving me all this information. If I'm interested, the information is here. It's clearly here. The color blue is... nice.
- I'm pleased with this flyer.

Flyer #9

- Hmm.. that's what I have to say about it.
- It's busy. Are those signs up there?
- It's a little confusing. These arrows are pointing – I don't know where. I don't know what kind of a flyer it is.
- If I wanted to know about this, I'd have to attend the meeting. I might google it.
- If this was a street in Paterson I would have liked it to say Freedom Blvd, because here in Paterson we have Freedom Boulevard and it's the worst drug-infested street imaginable. I think it's ironic and I don't understand how that street sign could be there, with all the activity that takes place on that street. Not to say that it's allowed, but it's allowed. The personalized touch does matter.

I want you to think about 2040, and really see 2040. When you see this date, what does long-term planning mean to you? When I talk about long-term planning, does it mean anything to you?

- Long-term planning means there's always room for improvement and constant updating, because there's always a change, there's always new development happening, so if you plan something

now for 2040, I'm sure by 20 years from now it's going to be something different, there might be a new development that comes up. It's a plan that has room for improvement, room for changes, so it's open. Nothing is set in stone.

- I don't think that date means the Philippines unless there is a concerted effort by the federal government to have a domestic martial plan with regards to our infrastructure in this country.

How do we get people interested in the year 2040? How do I get you to a meeting to discuss the year 2040?

- I think we should have something in writing, concrete
 - Not just speaking about it to get my opinion, but saying ok "we're having issues in development. We have the ground, and this is what we're going to do If we want to have it done by 2040, what is your input on the structure?" but not just taking my input and then before 2040 gets here, the deal doesn't go through.
- They'd have to show me architectural drawings, plans about how they're going to go about it, highways, etc, or whatever they're going to be doing
 - Something in advance of a meeting
 - The flyer itself should include photos and plans
- For me personally, if you show me the year 2040, you have to somehow relate it to my kids. [others in agreement]. Because if you tell me 2040, I'm thinking I'm way too old, by the time that year comes, who cares. But if you relate it to my child's future my interest is 100% there because I'm invested in my child's future.
- I might as well start training my nieces, nephews, and my kids for the plan for 2040 and tell them about this meeting, because they might be in great shape to go. I might not.
- Why do you use 2040?
 - *Why does the year 2040 offend or bother you?*
 - I won't be here.
 - [clarification that we are talking about a meeting that would happen now, but it would talk about 2040. The meeting would not be in the year 2040].
- I would attend because I care about the future of the region. I want to have a better place for the future and for my kids.
- I think that attending that meeting, something I might say might resonate, might be carried out in 2040 in whatever plan they have coming up.

Have you ever stopped to talk to someone doing outreach at a table in a public place, like a mall or street? (1:13:55)

- [Majority said yes]
- What made you stop?
 - Curiosity
 - Education
 - Being in the know

- Care about my community
- My son makes me stop
- Being a social worker, I always want to know what's available for people that need services

*If someone stopped you on the street in Paterson about transportation, who would stop to talk to them?
(1:14:50)*

- [all said yes]
- Why?
 - Interested in transportation
 - Traffic is horrible, the hours and times they decide to do construction at the busiest instructions– they're not doing anything in the middle of the day, but at 8am when everyone is trying to get somewhere that's when they decide to close off streets and do a million detours
 - At 8am, Paterson is chopped up

Do you use social media? (1:16:00)

- [all except two said yes]
- I don't do Facebook. I'm more of a private person, and I don't feel the need to tell everyone. I wonder why people put their business on Facebook. I don't need to hear everybody's problem.
- I don't do Facebook for the same reason, but I do other forms of social media. I use the internet for news and stuff
- *Have you interacted with another public agency or government via social media?*
 - [Majority said yes]
 - Who do you interact with?
 - Councilmen
 - Elected officials
 - DHS
 - Government programs – housing, youth programs
- *Do you follow transportation agencies on social media?*
 - That's a gray area. Only when there's a construction issue going on long-term, and I want to know when it's going to be over with and what traffic patterns are going to be like. I also use that 511 service.

Have you ever participated in an online survey?

- [Many said yes]

Look at the last page (Textizen). If you saw a sign like this, would you participate?

- [Majority said yes]

- I see my city. When I see Paterson being highlighted in a good light, and the rest of the state and country can see it, that's important
- What if it said North Jersey?
 - [Majority said yes]
 - It's easy to text an answer
- If it said "would you like to be part of a plan for 2040?" would you respond?
 - [Majority said yes]

Demographic Survey Results – Low-income Residents





