NORTH JERSEY TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AUTHORITY

Innovations in Public Involvement
Tips and Best Practices

Community Conversations

What it is

Community Conversations are a specific form of group session in which community members are asked to help identify and address critical community needs, issues, and solutions. Normally, these sessions are held in small groups (6 to 15 people). However, conversations can be conducted with subgroups in a larger community session, enabling all individuals present an opportunity to participate. Sessions are generally an hour to an hour and a half in length and are held in familiar, easily accessible, and neutral locations such as local cafes or bars, libraries, community centers, etc.

Why it Works

Many forms of public engagement are merely informative and do not necessarily empower community members or give them confidence that their voices are heard and their participation is meaningful. Ultimately, this limits the enthusiasm people have to participate at all.

The Community Conversations model, on the other hand, provides a more interactive approach. Sessions are designed as a forum to gather detailed input, and then that input is shared with the public so the agency can be held accountable for incorporating it into policy and action. Finally, feedback about the outcomes are requested to continue the flow of communication between the agency and the community.

When participants have an understanding that their input is actually considered and potentially acted on by an outside agency, they will be more eager to maintain a relationship with that agency and provide future input.

When to Use It

The Community Conversations model should be used if acquiring local input is of serious importance to the implementation of a program or development of a project and an agency wants to initiate a cycle of input, incorporation, and feedback. It can also be used as a method of increasing familiarity and trust between the agency and community.

Audience

While this approach to public engagement could be used for any demographic, it will be most appealing to people who are comfortable sharing personal opinions in small group settings or have the potential to be personally affected by the issues being discussed.

Estimated Level of Effort

Effort will be expended to: Plan and organize sessions, recruit participants, reserve spaces to hold sessions, facilitate and record discussions, analyze and draw up reports about participant input, determine how to incorporate input into agency action, and publicly demonstrate how the outcomes were influenced by the conversations to encourage continued participation.

Cost Considerations

Eliciting participation my require offering compensation for time, travel expenses, etc. It may also cost more than a typical public meeting to devise reports and advertise the outcomes to the public.

Examples

Boston, Massachusetts, Community Conversations series:

http://www.patriotledger.com/article/20150616/news/150619262

Nashville Area MPO, 2035 Comprehensive Plan:

http://www.nashvillempo.org/plans_programs/rtp/2035_involvement.aspx

Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, GO TO 2040 Citywide Plan:

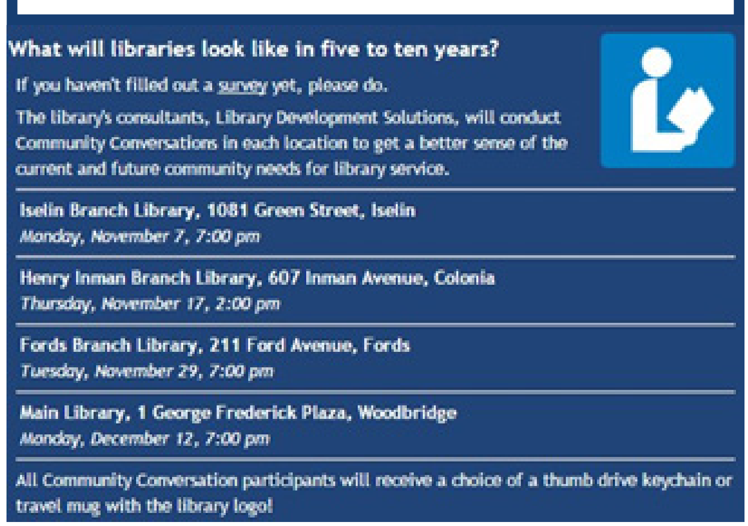
http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/29785/6-11_Community_Conversations.pdf/36082eab-249c-43b7-a120-cd5c79681798

Resources

http://www.unitedwayracine.org/com-convo

http://www.unitedwayracine.org/sites/unitedwayracine.org/files/Community%20Conversations%20Year-end%20Report%207-22-16%208.5x11%20FINAL.pdf

The Woodbridge Library conducted community conversations to hear residents' thoughts on the future of libraries.



What will libraries look like in five to ten years?

If you haven't filled out a survey yet, please do.

The library's consultants, Library Development Solutions, will conduct Community Conversations in each location to get a better sense of the current and future community needs for library service.

Iselin Branch Library, 1081 Green Street, Iselin
Monday, November 7, 7:00 pm

Henry Inman Branch Library, 607 Inman Avenue, Colonia
Thursday, November 17, 2:00 pm

Fords Branch Library, 211 Ford Avenue, Fords
Tuesday, November 29, 7:00 pm

Main Library, 1 George Frederick Plaza, Woodbridge
Monday, December 12, 7:00 pm

All Community Conversation participants will receive a choice of a thumb drive keychain or travel mug with the library logo!

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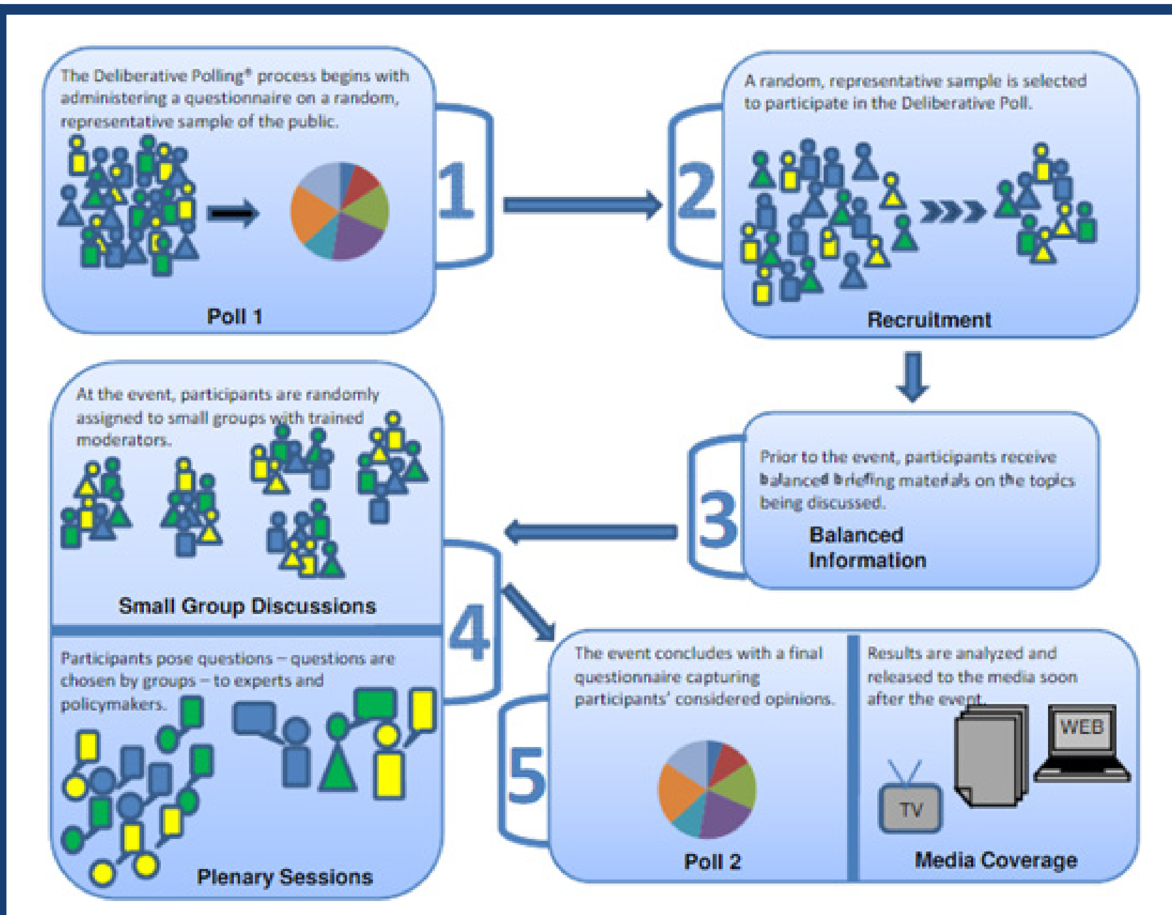
Deliberative Polling

What it is

Deliberative polling measures opinion changes when those polled are given an opportunity to engage in informed and reflective discussion. Usually, a random sample is polled on a certain issue or topic. After the initial poll, members of that sample are then invited to participate (this time, in person) in a more detailed discussion after being given briefing materials in advance. The sample is then polled once more after the detailed discussion has taken place. The differences in opinion before and after the detailed discussion represents how public opinion might be affected if people were better informed about a particular issue or topic.



A graphic developed by the What's Next, California? Project demonstrates the sequence of events in deliberative polling.

Why it Works

Deliberative polling is effective on multiple levels. Gauging changes in opinion before and after educational materials are disseminated and discussions take place is as simple as comparing the poll differences. More than likely, it will be very obvious if a greater depth of understanding results in major changes of overall opinion. Further, supposing that those changes occur, they can serve to illuminate whether or not a broader education program needs to be developed by an agency and what the format and content of that education should be. Also, the results can be broadcast to the wider public to demonstrate their lack of understanding about a subject and shift the dialogue surrounding it.

When to Use It

The primary objective of deliberative polling is to determine how people's opinions change as they become better informed. Therefore, it should be used in regard to a topic or issue that the public may not be particularly knowledgeable about. Further, it can be used to determine exactly how informed the public is, and whether increased education about a subject actually has a significant impact on how that subject is perceived and evaluated.

Audience

There are multiple "audiences" in deliberative polling. First, the agency that is utilizing the method is attempting to gauge the opinions of the public and how they can use educational tools to more effectively influence those opinions going forward. Second, the participants themselves are (potentially) gaining greater insight into a particular issue that is relevant to them. Third, the broader public becomes an external audience that is shown how the participants' views evolved as they became more knowledgeable. In regard to recruitment, participants will most likely need to be people with an intrinsic interest in the issue or topic at hand who also have the time and resources needed to take an initial and final poll, invest time reading educational materials, and attend a discussion session.

Estimated Level of Effort

While efforts to coordinate deliberative polling may vary, it can be assumed that greater efforts will yield more effective results. First, a poll needs to be designed and distributed and its results must be analyzed. Second, participants need to be recruited to take part in discussions. This step is more complicated than organizing a typical public meeting because educational materials need to be created and distributed beforehand, and knowledgeable moderators need to be recruited and trained to run the sessions. Finally, an analysis of the change in opinion must be performed and the results must be communicated both within the agency performing the deliberative polling and to the participants (and potentially the broader public). More than likely, the entire process may take multiple months from start to finish and will require significant amounts of planning and coordination.

Cost Considerations

The total cost of deliberative polling is an amalgamation of the costs of its component parts: The initial poll, development of educational materials, in-person discussions with moderators, and a final analysis. Of all the potential tools an agency may use for public engagement, deliberative polling is likely to be on the higher end of the cost spectrum. However, given a fitting issue and proper design, the results should be extremely useful.

Examples

Building New Renewable Energy Projects in Texas:

http://apps2.eere.energy.gov/wind/windexchange/pdfs/33177_tx.pdf

'Invent the Future' Workshops - Chicago Metro Area Planning's GOTO 2040 Plan:

http://imagine.boston.gov/blog/smslaunch/

Broad-based Public engagement in Kent County, Michigan:

http://www.kentcountyspeaks.org/

Resources

http://participedia.net/en/methods/deliberative-polling

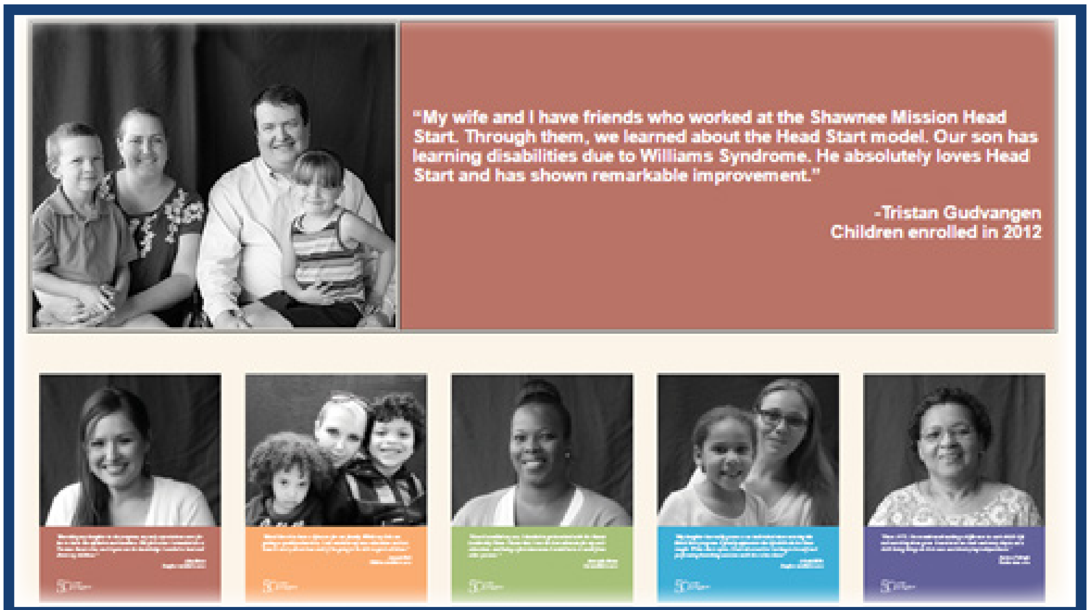
https://www.feedbackr.io/

http://www.nextca.org/pages/the-deliberative-opinion-poll

Digital Storytelling

What it is

Digital stories are first-person visual narratives told in the storyteller's own words and voice. They can combine text, still images, and short video clips that allow an individual to express their story of being impacted by a particular issue or program in a succinct and relatable way. Digital stories are often exhibited on an agency website, perhaps on the homepage or in a section dedicated to personal stories of local residents. However, an agency may also include a digital story as part of a larger news story about their program or project that is posted on a local news source's website.



The Mid-America Regional Council of the Kansas City Metro Area has a campaign called '50 Faces of Head Start' that gives insight into the personal stories of those who have benefitted from the program. Head Start provides comprehensive early childhood development and education services.

Why it Works

Demonstrating how an agency's program or a particular topic an agency wants to address effects the lives of real people provides a human element that can generate interest in or sympathy with a cause. Used at a local or even regional scale, some of the people sharing their stories may be recognizable, which allows viewers to understand a particular agency action on a personal level. At any given moment, there may be myriad agencies operating in a variety of capacities within a community, so it is important to find ways to stand out in the crowd. By providing compelling, relatable, personal stories, an agency can more effectively communicate the gravity of an issue and make its causes and goals seem more real.

When to Use It

Digital storytelling is an optimal strategy for allowing a target audience to make deep personal connections to an issue, program, or cause. It can also be very effective in demonstrating how relevant events have progressed over time. Digital stories can show how a specific event effected an individual or family, how someone benefitted or could benefit from a program, etc.

Audience

Personal anecdotes are relatable in some way to all people. Anyone who has the ability to access an agency's website and view the digital stories will be able to take something away from the experience. An agency may want to tailor digital stories to be most appealing to a specific target audience. However, they can also be used to broaden an agency's audience.

Estimated Level of Effort

If an agency already maintains a website, posts advertisements online, or is regularly featured by local new sources, creating a platform to exhibit digital stories should be relatively painless. The biggest effort required will be seeking out people with stories and asking them to contribute. Some additional effort may be required in developing the actual content, depending on the desired production value.

Example

Mid-America Regional Council's '50 Faces of Head Start' Campaign, Kansas City Metro Area:

http://www.marc.org/Community/Head-Start/50-Years-of-Opportunity/50-Faces-of-Head-Start

Resource

http://www.scottishhealthcouncil.org/patient__public_participation/participation_toolkit/digital_stories.aspx#.V7Z825grLIU

Cost Considerations

Presuming an agency already has a website that is regularly maintained, the only guaranteed costs involved are those related to seeking out people with relevant stories to share and reformatting the website to accommodate those stories. However, there may be some additional production costs if the agency has to record video footage or take pictures, or if those sharing their stories want some form of compensation.

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Keypad Polling

What it is

Keypad polling is an electronic polling technology that allows participants at various public meetings or other events to provide input on topics that a hosting agency wants feedback on. Questions are presented in a survey format to an audience (usually a large one) via an electronic projector or through the Internet. The audience members press the numbers or letters on their keypad that correspond with their personal opinions. Some technologies allow cell phones to take the place of the keypads so that participants can provide more detailed and individualized responses. The data is collected and analyzed immediately, and is usually displayed before the audience in real time (although this is optional – an agency may elect to keep the responses private and for their own research).

TurningPoint Technologies is just one of many companies that offer complete packages for keypad polling that include keypads for participants and software that can collect, analyze, and display response data almost instantaneously.

Why it Works

Demonstrating how an agency's program or a particular topic an agency wants to address effects the lives of real people provides a human element that can generate interest in or sympathy with a cause. Used at a local or even regional scale, some of the people sharing their stories may be recognizable, which allows viewers to understand a particular agency action on a personal level. At any given moment, there may be myriad agencies operating in a variety of capacities within a community, so it is important to find ways to stand out in the crowd. By providing compelling, relatable, personal stories, an agency can more effectively communicate the gravity of an issue and make its causes and goals seem more real.

When to Use It

An agency should utilize keypad polling when its goal is to obtain extremely accurate and honest feedback from a large audience, especially if the topic or issue begs questions that are controversial (and therefore best answered privately). Additionally, keypad polling is an excellent way to show the audience what everyone else is thinking. As such, it can be used as a strategy for demonstrating a consensus (or lack thereof) about a subject.

Audience

There is almost no limit to who can participate in keypad polling because it is a relatively simple technology. It can be used with children in schools or adult residents at community meetings. It can also be adapted to accommodate people with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). However, it may be difficult for those with visual impairments or low literacy levels to participate.

Examples

Enhancement of public meetings in cities across California:

http://www.westerncity.com/Western-City/June-2010/Using-Keypad-Polling-to-Enhance-Public-Meetings/

Input on various Metropolitan Area Planning Council projects; Boston, MA metro area:

http://www.mapc.org/keypads

Resources

https://www.turningtechnologies.com/pdf/BestPractices/ClickToEngage-Public-Agenda-2013.pdf

http://www.planningtoolexchange.org/tool/keypad-polling

http://mpotransportationoutreachplanner.org/mpotop/sites/default/files/outreach_strategies/instant-polling-technology.pdf

Estimated Level of Effort

Presuming that a meeting has already been coordinated and the technology is on hand, there is very little effort associated with keypad polling. A competent staff person may need to set up the software in advance and integrate questions into a presentation. Other than that, all an agency needs to do is distribute the keypads to participants and ask for input.

Cost Considerations

Keypad polling may be a significant financial investment. If an agency plans to use the technology often or on a consistent basis at meetings and other events, a full purchase of a package should be considered. Various companies offer differing products and packages, but an agency should expect to spend at least $1,000 and perhaps up to $3,000 on the technology. However, if an agency is anticipating only using keypad polling at a single event or very infrequently, much cheaper rental options are available that may cost anywhere from $100 to $500.

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"Meeting in a Box"

What it is

"Meeting in a Box" is a public engagement technique designed for community groups, neighborhood associations, or friends to gather at a convenient time and location to share their opinions about a plan or project in their community. Participants are given a "Meeting in a Box" kit that contains everything they need to hold a meeting/discussion on their own, including instruction sheets for the host/facilitator, discussion questions, worksheets for participant responses, feedback questionnaires, and directions for recording and returning responses. These kits can be completely paper-based, downloadable, and posted on a project or agency website for any interested individual or organization to use. However, kits can also include other meeting materials such as project posters, post-its, stickers, and other engagement materials that are relevant to the specific meeting design of the kit. These are usually distributed in a limited number. Sponsoring agencies can also provide snacks or a small stipend for refreshments, depending on the scope and budget of the project.

American Meetings, Inc. offers a professionalized "Meeting in a Box" service that includes a kit that contains all of the materials an agency may require for a meeting. This can be especially helpful for an agency that is holding multiple meetings in different locations but wants all of the meetings to be con-

Why it Works

The "Meeting in a Box" concept is an effective engagement technique because it leverages social connections that already exist in a community. Residents are more likely to participate and engage

Examples

National MS Society:

http://www.nationalmssociety.org/NationalMSSociety/media/MSNationalFiles/Documents/Live-Fully-Live-Well-SHGL-Discussion-Guide_Final_v2-LowRes-SinglePages.pdf

Ft. Lauderdale Meeting in a Box Facilitator Guide (youtube video):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ThrosdAK2Xs

College Park, Maryland:

http://www.collegeparkmd.gov/government/administration/StrategicPlan/College_Park_Meeting_in_a_Box_Instructions_FINAL.pdf

Rails to Trails Toolkit:

http://www.railstotrails.org/resource-library/resources/meeting-in-a-box-rails-to-trails-conservancy-s-toolkit-for-building-rail-trails/

Minneapolis 2040:

https://www.minneapolis2040.com/document/meeting-box

Resource

http://americanmeetings.com/meeting-types/meetings-in-a-box/

with a familiar organization or community member than an agency that might be perceived as an 'outsider' to the community.

When to Use It

"Meeting in a Box" is most effective when soliciting detailed, qualitative feedback from community members. Meeting in a Box encourages small group conversation and discussion, often associated with a deeper level of engagement. However, "Meeting in a Box" can also be used to distribute surveys and collect more quantitative data as well.

Audience

"Meeting in a Box" has broad appeal to a variety of audiences, but is most effective in areas with high civic participation rates.

Estimated Level of Effort

"Meeting in a Box" requires significant effort up front to develop the materials that will be included in the kit. Depending on the complexity of the specific project and the type of materials, upfront time investment could be anywhere from a couple of days to a few weeks. Some investment of time will also need to be made to publicize the meetings and recruit participants to run them on your behalf. This can be done via social media, through partner organizations, or even through earned media content. However, once the "Meeting in a Box" kits are distributed, there is almost no staff time required (aside from occasionally troubleshooting or responding to questions from participants). Bottom line: High upfront investment of time, but little ongoing time required.

Cost Considerations

Generally speaking, "Meeting in a Box" is a low cost engagement method. However, costs can vary depending on the types of meeting materials that are provided by the sponsoring organization. If materials are being custom printed or refreshments are being reimbursed (or stipend provided), then costs will be higher. A simple, downloadable packet is the lowest cost option for a "Meeting in a Box."

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Mobile Outreach

What it is

Mobile outreach is any form of outreach that exists within or through a vehicle that can quickly and easily be moved to where people tend to congregate, such as schools, libraries, shopping malls, churches, and community events. The specific form of mobile outreach may be a converted city bus, a rented ice cream truck that offers ice cream in exchange for participation, or any other vehicle used in a creative manner that helps to convey an agency's message. Participants may look at information materials such as posters and videos, take surveys, discuss issues with staff, etc.

A regional planning agency for the Tulsa, Oklahoma metro area transformed an ordinary city bus into a mobile transit lab featuring educational tools, LCD video screens, and interactive displays. Upon entering the bus, Tulsa residents were asked to take a short transit survey. More than 1,500 surveys were collected.

Why it Works

Mobile outreach is effective because it avoids the time and space limitations of traditional meetings and other outreach events. Vehicles can go wherever people are, whenever they happen to be there. Convenience is a requirement for participation for most people, and mobile outreach provides that convenience. Further, highly professionalized mobile outreach conveys an image of legitimacy and innovation for the agency, even to those who do not participate. A converted bus or other rented vehicle is a form of advertising that can create agency 'buzz' across a local community.

When to Use It

Mobile outreach has the potential to reach many people in a short period of time, but most of those people will only participate if the information presented is simple and doesn't take up too much of their time. An agency should utilize this concept if they want to develop their overall brand, distribute simple information, and receive lots of basic input from a broad range of community residents.

Example

Fast Forward Mobile Outreach Bus, Indian Nations Council of Governments, Tulsa Metro Area:

http://www.planetizen.com/plan/fast-forward-mobile-outreach-bus

https://www.planning.org/awards/2012/fastforward.htm

Resource

http://www.slideshare.net/rtspincog/fast-forward-mobile-outreach

Audience

There are no limitations to who might be interested in exploring the topics presented through a mobile outreach platform. The type of participants will vary depending on where an agency decides to set up shop. However, the key is to strategically plan a schedule or route to be in busy places when people at those places have spare time to invest.

Estimated Level of Effort

Mobile outreach most likely requires considerable effort. Beyond the usual time dedicated to developing informational materials, surveys, etc., an agency must adapt those materials to the physical form of the outreach. Also, location scouting should be done to devise a schedule/route that maximizes participation.

Cost Considerations

Converting a bus, renting an ice cream truck, etc. may be expensive. There also could be expensive associated with giveaways to participants. However, it is difficult to quantify the benefits of growing a brand and reaching a much greater number of people. There may be significant upfront costs and vehicles may require ongoing maintenance.

Open House

What it is

An open house is a buffet-style meeting where guests can drop in at any time and talk one-on-one with representatives at various booths or stations. It is an informal setting in which people can get information about a specific plan or project. Open houses have no set, formal agenda. Unlike a typical public meeting, no formal discussions or presentations take place, and there are no audience seats. Instead, people get information informally and at their own pace from various exhibits. Perhaps most importantly, attendees are encouraged to offer their opinions, comments, and preferences to staff (either orally or in writing). Usually there are different stations/tables/kiosks, each of which offers information about a single aspect of a project.

Why it Works

The casual format of an open house allows for more direct connection with attendees, which in turn allows them to feel more comfortable offering their input than they would in a formal setting with many people. Also, by breaking projects and plans (which can be extremely complex and detailed) into its component parts, participants can focus on the specific aspects that are most important or interesting to them. This also allows an agency to determine which parts of the project or plan are of most interest to the public, as more people will gravitate and provide feedback at those stations/tables/kiosks. Further, whereas public meetings usually occur only once and for a short period of time, open houses can take place over the course of an entire day or even an entire weekend, giving interested members of the community more flexibility to attend.

Open houses are a great opportunity for members of the public to talk with experts about plans and provide their input.

Examples

Neighborhood Main Streets Projects – Milwaukie, OR:

http://www.nationalmssociety.org/NationalMSSociety/media/MSNationalFiles/Documents/Live-Fully-Live-Well-SHGL-Discussion-Guide_Final_v2-LowRes-SinglePages.pdf

African American History Project – San Francisco, CA:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ThrosdAK2Xs

30% Design Plan for Broadway Improvement Project:

http://www.collegeparkmd.gov/government/administration/StrategicPlan/College_Park_Meeting_in_a_Box_Instructions_FINAL.pdf

Resources

https://connect.ncdot.gov/projects/toolkit/Pages/TechDetails.aspx?Title=Open%20Houses/Open%20Forum%20Hearings

https://www.fcm.ca/Documents/tools/International/Local_Government_Participatory_Practices_Manual_EN.pdf

When to Use It

Open houses are ideal for communicating issues surrounding complex, large-scale, multi-faceted plans to the public. They are also an effective strategy for collecting feedback about those plans, both general and specific, from participants. The interactive nature of an open house lends itself to plans that are in the progress of being developed and input is genuinely needed (as opposed to plans that are already nearly finalized and simple communication or public affirmation is the objective of the event).

Audience

The intended audience for an open house depends on the scale of the project/plans being exhibited. Presuming the scale is fairly local (neighborhood/municipality/small region), it is imperative to attract local community members to the event. Since the underlying intention is to solicit feedback, organizers should actively encourage attendance of those who will be impacted by the project/plans (business and property owners, local residents, etc.).

Estimated Level of Effort

The major effort required for hosting an open house is related to developing and coordinating individual exhibits so that each is unique and meaningful to attendees. High turn-out is important for receiving quality feedback, so open houses for projects/plans that are not particularly controversial may need to focus more intensely on advertising and recruiting attendees.

Cost Considerations

The major costs associated with hosting an open house include renting a space (if one is not already available to the agency), advertising the event, developing materials for exhibits (such as posters and other visuals, informational hand-outs, etc.), and potentially providing refreshments for attendees. Overall, the expenses should be relatively minimal.

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Participatory Budgeting

What it is

Participatory budgeting refers to a number of methods that give citizens direct or indirect influence over how their local government budgets are spent. It may be done in person, through extensive dialogue or through "piggybank" activities, where participants allocate beads to jars that represent their funding priorities. For a broader reach, many sophisticated online tools allow users to imagine they are the mayor and play with allocating different amounts to a set of predetermined funding priorities. With each decision, users see the budget balance change in real time, and obtain information on the consequences of reducing or increasing funding for a given item.

Why it Works

The residents of a community have an important perspective on its social and economic needs. If an agency wants to initiate a program or project that will involve reallocating funding, participatory budgeting is an effective way to gather input. Giving a community control over a portion of the local budget ensures that it is reflective of their needs and increases community support for government actions. Additionally, by being required to choose between several worthy projects when allocating limited funds, participants come to understand firsthand the difficult decisions that planners and policymakers must face – and why citizens' favorite projects may not always receive the level funding they desire.

Piggy Banks are an easy and inexpensive way to gauge funding priorities.

When to Use It

Participatory budgeting can be used for a variety of purposes: For understanding general priorities of a community related to funding for recreation, arts, and programming; for deciding between various proposed projects around a particular theme, such as transportation; and for improving relations and trust with the community following a period of distrust or anger about budget cuts.

Audience

Participatory budgeting tools are adaptable for a wide

Examples

Participatory Budgeting Project

The Participatory Budgeting Project is a nonprofit organization that equips communities to lead participatory budgeting processes, allowing their citizens to choose how to allocate real discretionary funds. The process involves digital tools, in-person meetings and deliberation, and community organizing to ensure that as many voices are heard as possible. It has been used extensively in New York City, where City Council members may elect to participate by devoting some of their budgets to PB.

www.participatorybudgeting.org

"Piggybank" Exercise

McHenry County, IL brought a simple "piggybank" exercise to their pop-up public outreach for their transportation plan, where passerby were invited to allocate pretend coins to the piggybanks that best represented how they wished to spend transportation dollars. Options included public transportation, roads, bicycle facilities, and pedestrian facilities.

https://www.co.mchenry.il.us/home/showdocument?id=30464

Resources

www.abalancingact.com

http://www.budgetsimulator.com/info

http://www.citizenbudget.com/

range of audiences. The piggybank activity can be used at pop-up events in public spaces and can even appeal to children. It is also easily adaptable to speakers of other languages if a staff member speaking that language is available to explain the activity. Online tools are effective and very versatile because they allow for high levels of specificity, and may be translatable, but they may limit participation to those with high-speed internet access and advanced understanding of how to use web-based programs.

Estimated Level of Effort

The piggybank activity can easily be added to an existing outreach event, and requires only simple preparation of materials as well as counting of the votes afterwards. Online tools require more set-up time, but often have built-in tools for analyzing results as well as user demographics, so the amount of effort depends on the end goal.

Cost Considerations

Costs depend on the type of activity used: Placing piggybanks, or empty jars, on a table representing different funding priorities and asking participants to allocate beads to the jars they care about is very inexpensive, versatile, and requires little set-up time. More sophisticated online platforms offer either subscription pricing, often around \$100-\$200 month, or project-based pricing, often around \$500 per project for three months.

From 2015-2016, New York City allocated \$32 million to Participatory Budgeting, and participants engaged through a series of meetings and votes.

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Participatory Mapping

What it is

Participatory mapping is a group-based qualitative research method that gives participants freedom to shape discussion on a given topic with minimal intervention from researchers. Put more simply, it is an activity whereby citizens are asked to mark preferences, locations, and other features related to a given topic on a map. The medium through which this process occurs has historically been a large, physical map that is brought out at a meeting or other public venue so that the public can write, draw, or place post-it notes directly on it. However, there are now web-based applications such as Crowd-Map which allows vast numbers of internet users to digitally provide personal input.

Why it Works

Perhaps no one has a more intimate understanding of the geographical dynamics of a community than the people who actually live there. If an agency wants to initiate a program or project that has a distinct geographical component (which very well be most), participatory mapping is an effective way to gather input. Even if an agency is confident that it has a solid understanding of where certain things are or should be, the local community may have a contrasting opinion and it is important to gain insight

Participatory mapping can be made available through online resources (at left) or be included as an activity facilitated by staff at an agency event (above).

into those differences. Further, maps are tangible objects that bring the abstract issues of planning into a visual world that community members can imagine and relate to, which in turn spurs on their interest in participation.

When to Use It

Participatory mapping can be used for a variety of purposes: To help communities articulate and communicate spatial knowledge to interested agencies; to allow communities to record and archive local knowledge; to assist communities in land-use planning and resource management; to enable communities to advocate for change; to increase a community's effective capacity; to address resource related conflict; etc. Ultimately, an agency would be well served to use participatory mapping when trying to understand a community's perception of any topic that has geographical implications.

Example

Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, Mercer County Bikeability Map:

http://www.dvrpc.org/webmaps/MercerBLOS/

Chicago Snow CrowdMap:

https://chicagosnow.crowdmap.com/

Resource

https://www.ifad.org/documents/10180/d1383979-4976-4c8e-ba5d-5341e37cbcc

https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/do-it/techniquesapproaches/participatory-mapping

http://www.researchfororganizing.org/index.php?page=community-mapping#Activity37

Audience

All people who have any semblance of geo-spatial awareness of the landscape in question should be able to contribute in a participatory mapping exercise. Physical, in-person variations of this method are better suited for those who may need a staff member to facilitate their understanding of the map and the mapping goals. The online variation is effective because it allows for high levels of specificity and is extremely versatile, but it may limit participation to those with high-speed internet access and advanced understanding of how to use web-based programs.

Estimated Level of Effort

Presuming the input an agency wants to receive from a community is already determined (i.e. – "where should the new bus stop be located on Elm Street?"), the only effort that is required is developing a map (physical or digital) that portrays the area of concern in a manner which allows for a high level of community feedback. Online versions are more complex to maintain, but there are web programs available that simplify the process.

Cost Considerations

Costs can vary from extremely cheap (printing out a large map and asking people at public meetings to draw 'X's on areas of concern) to moderately expensive (maintaining a volunteered-content digital map that allows users to insert pins and other information that are catalogued in an online database). Determining which variation is more appropriate will depend on agency goals.

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Innovations in Public Involvement
Tips and Best Practices

Pop-Up Meetings

What it is

Pop-up meetings are a way to engage the public by bringing the meetings to where people already are, rather than asking them to go out of their way to come to a meeting at a specific location. The physical format of a pop-up meeting is only limited by an agency's creativity and resources: It can take on the traditional 'tent and tables' format or be as elaborate as the retrofitted truck shown below. The purpose of the pop-up meetings can be simply informative (distributing pamphlets, displaying posters, etc.) to more participatory (administering surveys, holding impromptu Q and A sessions, etc.).

Why it Works

It can be hard to recruit participants for traditional public meetings. Many people do not have time or are simply unable to go out of their way to attend. The benefit of a pop-up meeting is that it can be organized in convenient and heavily trafficked places such as farmers markets, shopping malls, downtown streets, and busy parking lots. A pop-up meeting is also effective because it doesn't have the 'one and done' limitation of a traditional public meeting: It can be moved to different places, allowing

Public Art Saint Paul has an artistically retrofitted city truck that is used to engage communities in public venues and customize civic meetings based on place. In exchange for their thoughts, survey responses, or handwritten love letters to the city, participants receive ice pops.

for multiple meetings in different locations in a single day. Further, if certain areas or venues prove to be more effective for attracting participants, the pop-up can quickly and easily be set up there again.

When to Use It

Pop-up meetings are effective when an agency wants to distribute information or solicit feedback from a community without having to jump through the usual hoops to garner participation. It is also an opportunity to advertise a specific project or program (or perhaps the agency itself).

Audience

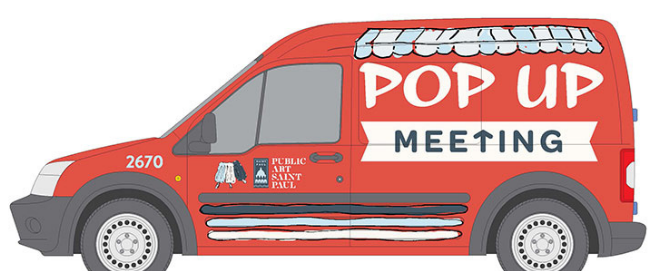
Pop-up meetings can be used to approach and solicit feedback from any population in any heavily trafficked area. However, the usual considerations of how to accommodate the anticipated audience should be maintained (i.e. - If a pop-up meeting is being organized in a neighborhood with many LEP Spanish-speakers, information should be provided in Spanish and bilingual staff members or translators should be on hand).

Estimated Level of Effort

The amount of effort exerted to organize a pop-up meeting will vary greatly depending on the nature of the materials being developed or distributed, the number of events and locations the pop-up is organized for, and the physical form of the pop-up itself. A 'tent-and-table' approach is fairly simple and straightforward, but it may not be as eye-catching and inviting as other more elaborate approaches (such as retrofitting a vehicle).

Cost Considerations

Depending on the format of the pop-up meeting and the materials involved, there could be a significant initial monetary investment. Staff may also need additional training to effectively hold pop-up meetings in diverse venues. However, any costs associated with organizing a traditional public meeting (advertising, renting a space, providing refreshments, offering payment or travel reimbursements in exchange for participation) could be eliminated.



http://datasmart.ash.harvard.edu/

Examples

Public Art Saint Paul, St. Paul, Minnesota:

http://publicartstpaul.org/project/pop-up/#about_the_project/

River North/Streeterville Transit Study, Chicago, Illinois:

http://www.rnstransit.com/outreach-popupMeetings.html

Resources

http://www.foursquareitp.com/blog/engaging-the-public-on-transit

http://www.sharpandco.com/ways-to-boost-public-involvement/

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Innovations in Public Involvement
Tips and Best Practices

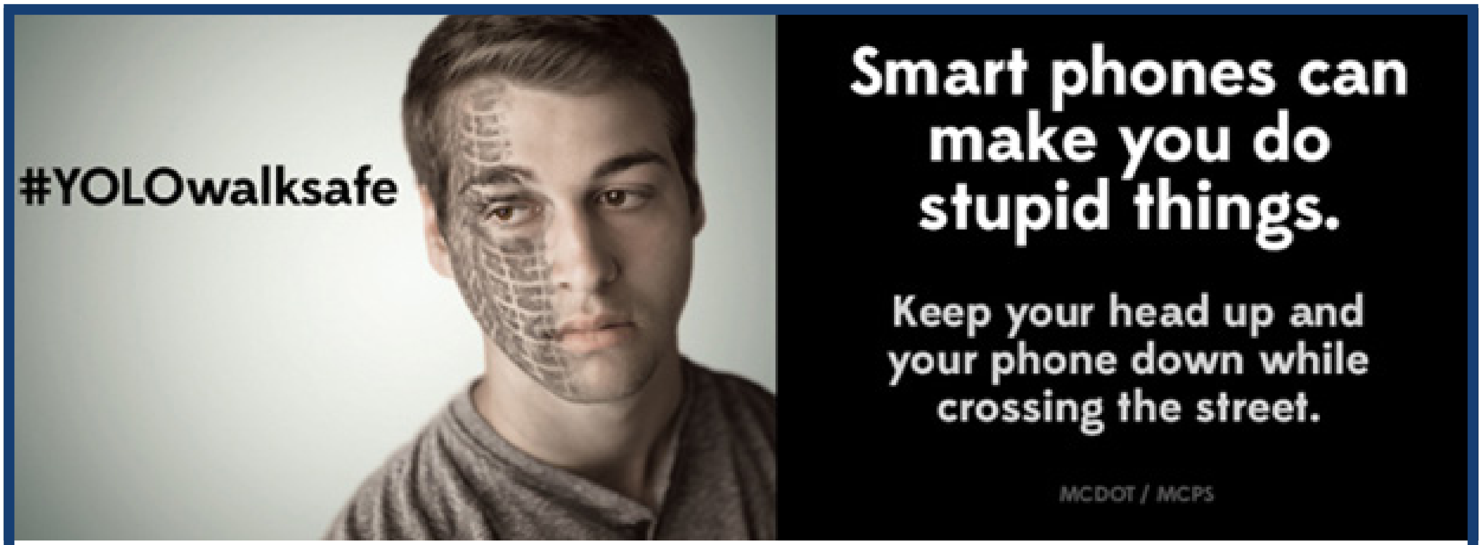
Social Media Photo Campaign

What it is

Social media photo campaigns are a way for an agency to promote a program or raise awareness about an issue through encouraging the public to volunteer relevant photos and other media online. Typically, they convey simple, 'tagline'-oriented messages and have widespread, ubiquitous appeal to maximize participation. There is no limitation on the range of topics a campaign may address. Once a theme is developed by an agency, the public is invited to develop their own content related to that theme and share it with their friends, family, and the general public.

Why it Works

The incredible reach of social media cannot be denied, and there may be no more effective way to quickly spread a message to a large audience. Photo campaigns on social media have an avalanche effect in which a post generates more posts, each of which in turn generates more posts. Participation is attractive to social media users because it is free of cost, relatively quick and simple, and can be fun, exciting, or humorous.



The Montgomery County, Maryland DOT developed a Twitter campaign to promote its pedestrian safety program. The public was encouraged to share its own photos and other media by using the hashtag #YOLOwalksafe.

When to Use It

An agency should create a campaign primarily to spread awareness of or promote a simple message. A picture is often more powerful than words, so this type of campaign should be used for concepts that are highly visual and do not need much explanation. It can be used as a pathway to a deeper message, but the campaign itself should not be bogged down by complexity. Also, it may not be the best medium to draw attention to controversial matters that require in-depth analysis.

Audience

Social media campaigns are mostly used to target younger, media-savvy audiences. However, internet and smart phone usage is expanding rapidly across all demographics, so such limitations on campaigns may no longer be in effect.

Examples

#YOLOwalksafe Campaign, Montgomery County, Maryland:

https://twitter.com/yolowalksafe

http://www.schooltrainingsolutions.com/blog/yolo-walk-safe-program-promotes-pedestrian-safety-among-high-school-students/

Resources

http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/3-social-media-engagement-techniques-that-work/

http://www.phrp.com.au/issues/march-2015-volume-25-issue-2/social-media-campaigns-make-difference-can-public-health-learn-corporate-sector-social-change-marketers/

Estimated Level of Effort

Most effort will be directed towards devising a simple and catchy yet effective campaign theme that can generate a popular buzz and then deploying that theme across various social media platforms. Once a campaign is established, some effort is required to maintain interest in the theme by adapting it to stay relevant. Research may also be required to determine effective placement of advertisements if they are being used to promote the campaign.

Cost Considerations

Generally speaking, this should be a nearly cost-free tool for engaging the public. Twitter, Facebook, and other social media platforms allow completely free participation. However, an agency may want to pay for physical and/or virtual advertisements to help promote the campaign.

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Textizen

Advertisements encouraging people to provide feedback can be displayed in a variety of ways and venues, such as at transit stops, on telephone poles located on busy public streets, or as tabletop ads in waiting rooms, restaurants, etc.

What it is

Textizen is a web platform that sends, receives, and analyzes text messages. An agency customizes a campaign online by devising question types, creating built-in logic, customizing area codes, etc. People are then invited to participate in the campaign by texting responses to questions that are displayed on transit ads, postcards, at live events, or whatever venue fits the desired audience. Texts sent by participants initiate automated text conversations that address follow-up and/or related questions. The breadth and depth of the text conversations is entirely up to the designer. Textizen also provides outreach strategy, design, and content development services.

Why it Works

Over 90% of Americans have text messaging options on their phones, so opening up participatory communication through that medium carries with it the potential of getting feedback from an enormous population. Perhaps most importantly, it is extremely easy and convenient for people to participate. Depending on where you display the advertisements, people may be in a position where they are waiting or bored (and potentially in the process of using their phones anyway). Participating may actually be a fun way to pass the time. Further, it is a 'no pressure' form of participation: People do not have to go out of their way to send in responses, there is no set length of time that participants must dedicate to responding, it removes any discomfort people might have with dealing with someone in person, it does not require submittal of personal information (other than a cell phone number), it is an extremely simple and easy process, and it is totally free of cost.

When to Use It

Textizen can be used creatively to acquire feedback for any topic. However, while the depth of the questioning can be customized by the agency, it is probably best to keep questions simple and straightforward. It is a great tool for getting lots of quick feedback about basic concepts. The most effective way to keep participants interested is to use 'yes or no' or multiple choice questions with clear and simple options. Overall, an agency should use Textizen to quickly determine if a community has a consensus response to a broad query.

Audience

Anyone who has a cell phone with texting capability can participate. In the past, this may have included a more limited audience, but today this includes people of all ages, socio-economic statuses, etc. Given that the purpose is to receive as much feedback as possible, it would be wise to place advertisements in more densely populated areas. In general, an agency should expect to receive the most feedback from young adults, as they are more adept at using various cell phone features and tools and also are less suspicious about having their cell phones numbers made available.

Examples

Philadelphia 2035 Comprehensive Plan:

http://planphilly.com/articles/2012/06/05/city-philadelphia-and-code-america-launch-textizen

Imagine Boston 2030 Citywide Plan:

http://imagine.boston.gov/blog/smslaunch/

Broad-based Public engagement in Kent County, Michigan:

http://www.kentcountyspeaks.org/

Resources

https://www.textizen.com/welcome

http://www.challengestodemocracy.us/home/leveraging-technology-to-improve-participation-textizen-and-oregons-kitchen-table/#sthash.Au9zhy8X.dpbs

Estimated Level of Effort

The challenging parts of using Textizen are determining what questions to ask and deciding where to place advertisements, and the Textizen team offers assistance for both. Once an agency's questions have been honed and advertisement locations figured out, setting up the campaign online is a fast and painless process. Assuming that the questions are properly devised and the ads effectively located, participants' responses are collected and analyzed by Textizen, which in turn provides the agency with clear and concise data to evaluate.

Cost Considerations

There are myriad factors that can alter the cost of using Textizen, but anticipated survey volume is the primary factor of determination. Setting up a campaign in a large city will be vastly more expensive than setting one up in a suburban town. The outreach strategy, design, and content development services that Textizen offers are considered additional expenses. Lastly, an agency should take into account the expense associated with whatever form of advertising they are utilizing (i.e. – renting ad space at bus stop shelters or on trains, designing, printing, and distributing flyers, etc.)..

Innovations in Public Involvement
Tips and Best Practices

Trusted Advocates

A Public Outreach and Engagement Liaison (POEL) for the City of Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods helps run a public meeting for members of his community.

What it is

Successfully used in cities across the country, the Trusted Advocate engagement model contracts with a member of a specific community to lead engagement of his/her community in a public process. The Trusted Advocates usually have deep connections to their communities as organizers and/or advocates. Trusted Advocates have demonstrated their abilities to navigate cultural and language differences, and have the confidence of both the people in their communities and the public agency. The role of a Trusted Advocate is a flexible one that may take on different responsibilities depending on the goals of the agency and the type of audience that they are trying to reach. A Trusted Advocate can be utilized to provide quality translations at agency events, provide fair and equitable facilitation in native languages, do simultaneous interpretation, provide advice and expertise on cultural concerns and barriers, keep records and make reports of participant feedback, recruit community members to attend events, assist in running workshops, etc. Overall, Trusted Advocates are intermediaries that open up channels of communication and trust between specific communities and the agency working to serve those communities.

Why it Works

The Trusted Advocate model is effective because people are much more likely to participate in an event or meeting if someone they know and have confidence in will not only be in attendance with them, but also facilitating the flow of information. Trusted Advocates lend credibility to the agencies they work for and ensure that the agency is getting accurate, representative, and high quality feedback from the target community.

Examples

City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods, Public Outreach and Engagement Liaisons:

http://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/programs-and-services/outreach-and-engagement

District Councils Collaborative of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, Trusted Advocates Project:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ThrosdAK2Xs

Resources

http://www.cssp.org/publications/neighborhood-investment/top-five/making-connections-a-trusted-advocate-a-multicultural-approach-to-building-and-sustaining-resident-involvement.pdf

http://www.funderscollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Trusted-AdvocateProjectEvaluation.pdf

http://www.ourregion.org/documents/Community%20AmbassadorTeam%20Training_1.pdf

When to Use It

If an agency wants to reach a specific community or demographic but does not have a high level of familiarity with it (or vice versa), the Trusted Advocate model is an effective bridge of communication and learning.

Audience

Trusted Advocates are most commonly used to connect with underrepresented communities that may have low levels of familiarity with or trust in an agency. Such groups may include minority, LEP, and immigrant communities. However, there is no reason the model cannot be expanded to other demographics. For example, an agency could reach out to seniors by recruiting a respected member of a retirement community or to young people by connecting with members of a local college government.

Estimated Level of Effort

The manner in which an agency wants to utilize a Trusted Advocate will ultimately be determined by the nature of the community and the goals of the agency. Components that require effort include: recruiting advocates, potential training, and organizing/maintaining a program if the concept is adopted by an agency on a more permanent basis. If an agency has solid connections with various community based-organizations that it can utilize to recruit talented liaisons, much less effort will be required.

Cost Considerations

Trusted Advocates usually work on a contractual basis, so an hourly wage or set project payment is usually offered in exchange for their services. They may also require some specific training depending on how an agency wants to use them. Finally, in the event that an agency develops this model into a full-fledged program, some staff may be needed to organize and run that program. There is a possibility of recruiting Trusted Advocates on a volunteer basis, but an agency is more likely to draw in the most effective recruits if some form of compensation is offered.