

Business Owners

Who They Are:

Business owners offer a unique perspective in the planning process because they are often deeply rooted in the community where they do business, even if they do not reside there. In small businesses, the owner may be the only employee or one of few, and spend a majority of their time at the business.

Business owners may have concerns about how a project will affect their business, especially if it leads to loss of parking, road closures, or loss of visibility from the street. They may also have unique insight into their customers and what is important to them. They are important to engage because their businesses play an essential role in the economy and social life of the community.

Example:

The Albany Area MPO conducted door-to-door outreach to many businesses as an active outreach method for the Albany Area Regional Transportation Plan in November 2015. They connected with businesses through the Chamber of Commerce, service organizations such as Rotary and Elks that had members in the business community, and by targeting specific businesses such as bicycle shops.

<https://goo.gl/FULIYT>



Best Practices:

Outreach should be

- **Helpful:** During road closures, offer to assist businesses to notify customers and develop parking alternatives.
- **Where they are:** Make presentations or offer workshops during business association meetings or at the businesses themselves.

Recommended Strategies:

- **Visit Small Businesses in Person:** Visiting in person helps obtain feedback from and form partnerships with business owners who may not have time to attend an event.
- **Advisory Committees:** A board comprised of local business owners can give agencies feedback on important matters, such as how to increase foot traffic in business corridors or minimize disruptions during construction.
- **Workshops:** A workshop geared towards small businesses may help owners engage with a specific issue of interest, such as how to obtain bike racks in front of their store or how to deal with upcoming road closures.
- **Business Survival Kit:** Distribute information to businesses on how to mitigate negative effects of impending road closures or construction.

Children and Teens

Who They Are

Children and teens are people below age 18 (sometimes referred to as Generation Z). Children are not likely to engage with public issues without strong encouragement from adults, but increasingly as they become teenagers they may begin to identify what is important to them and look for ways to give back. While underage participants are often overlooked in the participation process, agencies are starting to find ways to engage their youngest constituents, often through partnerships with schools or community-based organizations. Due to their wide range of ages, children and teens use different forms of technology but generally use it at high rates.



Best Practices

Outreach should be:

- **Inviting:** Teens may feel intimidated about lending their voice to a process when older, more experienced adults dominate. Be clear that young peoples' opinions are sought and valued, and that no professional experience or knowledge is necessary to participate. Also ensure that all ideas are acknowledged and recorded. Don't shy away from discussing their "big ideas" but clearly explain if an idea cannot be implemented; look for opportunities to teach as well as listen.
- **Done in Partnership:** Partnering with schools can be an effective way to reach large numbers of young people, but partnering with youth groups, scouts, or sports leagues can make participation seem more fun and credible. Additionally, outreach should reflect the ethnic diversity of the children being reached.
- **Appealing:** Young people may be attracted to an engagement opportunity because they are looking to strengthen college applications, their friends are going, there will be pizza, or there is a fun component like a competition or game. Make it clear what the appeal is from the beginning.
- **Close to Home:** Most children and teens cannot drive themselves to an event, so outreach should meet them where they are at: schools, parks, movie theaters, etc. Providing transportation for teens and youth can be complicated because of legal restrictions and liability.

Recommended Strategies:

- **Youth Leadership Programs:** Youth leadership programs can teach local youth about the roles of planners and the issues that the field of planning addresses. They also allow participants an opportunity to gain a realistic understanding of the problems their communities face and encourage them to take an active role in helping to alleviate those problems.
- **Pop-up kiosks at museums and other key locations:** High school football games, street fairs, museums, zoos, skate parks, and other locations where teens gather or kids take field trips provide opportunities for engaging this population without needing to market an event ahead of time. Activities used at pop-up events should be simple and easy to understand. Visual preference surveys, art projects, visualization exercises, short competitions, or posing for photos with “I want to see ___ in my neighborhood” signs are all quick, inexpensive, and fun ways for groups of children or teens to participate together.
- **Web Portals:** Creating a simple, child-friendly website is an effective way to educate, inform, and even gather input from young people. Websites could include virtual children’s books, short quizzes, fun games, movies, a coloring/painting page, or puzzles.
- **Student Contests:** Hold a contest in local high schools to solicit ideas from students for solving a transportation problem. The contest will engage students who might not otherwise participate, and help them learn about planning issues pertinent to their community.
- **Instagram:** Agencies wishing to engage users can start campaigns using hashtags that encourage users to submit photos around that theme. Agencies can also use it as a way to post flyers or visually convey information about current projects, from construction updates to renderings of options for a new corridor or station design.
- **Activity Books:** Simple books or pamphlets using cartoon humor and characters to engage children in learning about a project through coloring, matching, or other activities.
- **Transportation Field Trips:** Offer students trip to transit facilities or on a bus ride for the first time to inspire students to get interested in transportation issues from a young age and teach them how to use transit.



Generation Z’s Social Media Usage*



88% Snapchat



88% Instagram



81% Facebook



66% Twitter

*from a study by SCG
<http://bit.ly/2sRMVP7>

Example:

The Mid-America Transportation Center, a research center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, hosts regular K-12 tours, field trips, and outreach activities to spark interest in transportation careers. Activities include building structures and testing them on an earthquake “shake table,” measuring traffic speeds with a LiDAR gun, or watching a concrete cylinder crack under the weight of a stress test. The Center partners with schools to host annual summer engineering camps as well as a “Roads, Rails, and Race Cars” after school club, and has reached 679 students since 2008.

<http://matc.unl.edu/education/tours.php>



Innovations in Public Involvement Tips and Best Practices

Closing the Loop

The Importance of Follow-Up in Community Engagement

Many agencies devote a great deal of time to planning and executing a public outreach event or campaign. The preparation of materials, advertisements, hashtags, and venue reservations can consume staff members for months. Yet your outreach hardly ends when the last cookie is consumed and the last survey dropped in the box. All too often, agencies forget that what happens afterwards may be the most important part. Why and how should you follow up with the public who takes time to get involved in your program?

The Problem

Focus groups of diverse populations throughout New Jersey revealed that one of the primary reasons that many people do not engage with public agencies or attend public meetings is because they do not have confidence that anyone is listening. They may have showed up once to protest a new bike lane on their street, but it got built anyway. They may have attended a meeting but felt that officials were talking as if the decision was already made. Or they may have been excited about a proposed improvement and filled out a survey to show their support, but never heard another word about it again.

Building Relationships of Trust

Across the country, public agencies are leading the way in a new vision for public outreach. Agencies can earn the community's trust by demonstrating that when people participate, their opinions are heard. Following up after participation gives the agency credibility and shows that they value the community. It also helps residents feel that their valuable time was well-spent in participating, encouraging them to devote time again in the future.

But How?

Whether your outreach effort is a meeting, a pop-up event, or all via social media, be sure to first determine the best way to follow up with your participants. On social media, this may be straightforward. At a meeting or pop-up event, you can ask people for their preferred contact method or distribute cards with your website and social media tags for them to find you. Be sure to ask what they prefer and provide options for people who do not use the internet or own smartphones. Follow-up outreach may take place via email, recorded voicemails, social media, blog posts, media coverage, or additional events and pop-up outreach.

Regardless of the medium used, follow-up messaging should first thank the participant for choosing to engage with your project. You should also acknowledge the resounding messages that you heard from the public, including the majority opinion, if any, and other notable concerns expressed by the public. You should then explain what actions your agency is taking as a result of the outreach, and which

actions it cannot take and why. Although vociferous advocates may still be angry when their wishes are not granted, they will likely respect your transparency and honesty in explaining why a choice was made and how it meets the needs of the community. Because decision-making can take time, these messages may be spread out over several months but the initial follow-up should take place promptly after the event.

When changes are finally implemented and projects begun, attracting media coverage can help to spread the word to the public about how their time and tax dollars are being spent, while cultivating a positive image for the agency. In future follow-up, you may also want to give participants a chance to join a Citizen's Advisory Board or a survey group that provides regular feedback to the agency about issues of concern.

Public engagement is a challenge and it may take time to find the strategy that works well for your community. While there are different methods of follow-up, the important thing is that your agency recognizes the opportunity to respect those who engage with you and lay groundwork for stronger, more trusting relationships with the public in the future.

Immigrants and LEP

Who They Are:

Immigrants and LEP individuals bring a diverse array of perspectives to the planning process. Depending on the area, LEP residents may come from mostly the same language background or represent a variety of first languages as well as different countries.

In New Jersey, **12.4% of the population** reports speaking English less than “very well,” and of those, over half speak Spanish at home, a figure that is growing. Other common languages include Chinese dialects, Korean, Portuguese, and Gujarati (India). Many individuals understand more English than they are comfortable speaking, but still prefer to speak in their native language, especially when discussing complex issues.

Because they may have had negative experiences in their home countries that drove them to emigrate, immigrants are underrepresented in the planning process not only due to language barriers, but also mistrust of government, safety concerns, or intimidation.



Best Practices:

The cultural nuances, communication styles, and engagement preferences of immigrant communities are as diverse as the communities themselves. Outreach should be:

- **Approachable:** Some immigrants fear traditional public meetings or other “official” gatherings because they may lack documentation in the United States, they don’t feel invested, or they are afraid they will not understand what is being discussed. Bringing meetings to the places where these groups already congregate (plazas, stores, school activities, cultural fairs, ESL classes, soccer games, or laundromats) can invite people to participate who would not otherwise.
- **In their language:** Interpreters provide flexibility for handling small numbers of LEP residents in a public meeting; however, outreach is more effective if bilingual staff are available to converse with LEP residents directly in their native language. If enough speakers of one language are expected, events can be held entirely in another language.
- **Shareable:** Creating takeaways that participants can share with family and friends, or that children can share with parents, helps spread the word in communities that rely more on word-of-mouth communication.

- **Relevant to their Family's Needs:** Connecting issues to personal experiences, their children, or a family member makes it more relevant to their daily lives. Even planning for 20 years in the future is tangible if they see that it relates to their children.

- **Visual:** Photos, graphics, and hands-on activities transcend language barriers and make topics more understandable for those who have less background on the topic. Because some immigrants may not have had the opportunity to attend school in their home countries, visual information can also help when translated text is not understood.

- **Focused on Safety:** Some immigrants come from countries where riding transit or walking poses personal security risks. Outreach that focuses on safety may help overcome these barriers.

Recommended Strategies:

- **Trusted Advocates:** Hire outreach workers for specific demographics who are already respected members of that community. They can serve as liaisons that link the agency to the community by facilitating communication and recruiting participants at agency events.

- **Visit Small Businesses in Person:** Visiting small businesses in person gives hard-working entrepreneurs a chance to engage without leaving their place of business, and can be a tool to form partnerships.

- **"Know Your Rights" Page:** A "Know your rights" page can be dedicated to sharing information with underserved communities regarding resources and procedures in place and their rights to access them. This can help ensure that all residents are able to participate in an agency's programs and decision-making processes, and is especially important in communities with a history of being denied rights.

- **Use Ethnic Media Outlets:** Some immigrant groups and other minority communities get their news primarily through ethnic or foreign language media outlets such as television and radio stations and newspapers offered in a particular language, such as Spanish or Arabic. Agencies should look into advertising their programs, projects, etc. through these means because they may be the only way to reach such audiences.

- **Graphic Novels:** Graphic novels, or comics, are a popular medium with the Latino community to convey ideas. They facilitate word-of-mouth communication as they are easy to share with friends and family.

- **Students Surveying Parents:** Elementary students can be assigned to interview family members about a local issue or transportation project.

- **Partner with ESL Classes:** Going to ESL classes is a great opportunity to reach residents who are reluctant to participate in civic affairs. A brief, easy-to-understand presentation could be made (in coordination with the instructor or school) and it could be integrated into the language training program.

Languages of LEP residents in New Jersey



57.8% Spanish



4.9% Chinese dialects



3.8% Korean



3.8% Portuguese



2.9% Gujarati

Example:

TriMet in Portland, Oregon found that creating a graphic novel about how to ride transit was an effective way to share information with the Latino community and increase ridership among Spanish speakers.

The novel, *Viaje Mejor*, reflects a culturally resonant form of communication that is easily shared with family and friends, and is relatable because it follows the personal story of a new Latino immigrant learning to navigate the transit system in Portland.

See it at <http://trimet.org/pdfs/espanol/viaje-mejor.pdf>.

Local Officials

Who They Are

Local officials include council members, planning board members, mayors, and other local representatives who may be interested in how a project affects their constituents. Developing positive relationships with these officials can greatly assist a project team. They should be involved because their approval and cooperation may be required for current or future projects to proceed successfully, and they may also be a vital link to certain communities or have valuable knowledge about their constituents.

Example

The Milwaukee Public Library offers semiweekly tours of their sustainable Green Roof, which features solar panels and gardens to help the library become more eco-friendly. The tours offer information on the Green Roof and tips on becoming more “green” at home and at work. While open to the public, tours of this type could also be adapted for local officials as a way of gaining their support for a project and promoting its benefits to the community.

http://mpl.org/about/green_roof/tours.php



Best Practices

Outreach should be

- **Proactive:** Be sure to involve elected officials early in the process so they know their participation is valued and to allow them to receive information directly.
- **Personalized:** Officials will appreciate being reached out to individually, rather than as part of a group, especially if the project falls in their specific jurisdiction.
- **In Partnership:** Elected officials should know their communities well, and would appreciate being consulted for their expert knowledge.
- **Honoring:** Respect elected officials' time and encourage future involvement by publicly recognizing those who attend the project's meetings and events

Recommended Strategies

- **Key Informant Interviews:** Interviewing a local official can help an agency obtain insight into the community and the issues of interest there.
- **Round Table Workshops:** Leadership-focused roundtables help participants collaborate to develop ideas around a particular theme. Officials may participate or lead a roundtable of citizens, which may help them to feel ownership of the project.
- **Tours:** Take officials on a walking tour of a new project site to answer questions. Being educated on the project will help them effectively share information with their constituents and encourage cooperation with project staff.

Low-Income People

Who They Are:

While the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) in 2016 was \$24,300 for a family of four, in reality many people earning over the FPL are still living under very constrained budgets in most of the United States. Percentage of Area Median Income (AMI) is often used instead as an indicator of economic status because it is relative to the income of the county or metropolitan area, which reflects cost of living and perceptions of economic status. Many agencies consider 80% of AMI to be a general standard of economic disadvantage.

Many low-income people balance multiple jobs and face insecurity of housing, food, and transportation. They also struggle to pay for daycare. They are likely to receive information through word-of-mouth, social media, or community organizations.



Best Practices:

Low-income people have specific needs that may present a challenge to agencies looking to involve them. Outreach should be:

- **Convenient:** With multiple responsibilities and limited transportation budgets, low-income people may have difficulties traveling far to reach a public meeting; events should take place in their neighborhoods. Pop-up or mobile outreach may also be more effective. If a local meeting is not possible, consider reimbursing transportation costs for eligible participants or providing bus tickets.
- **Incentivized:** Providing activities for children or food at a meeting may be a draw to participation, as would cash for more intense involvement, like focus groups.
- **Rooted in the Community:** An outreach worker who grew up in the community will be more effective and build a better rapport with residents.
- **A Positive Reflection of the Community:** With multiple responsibilities and limited transportation budgets, low-income people may have difficulties traveling far to reach a public meeting; events should take place in their neighborhoods. Pop-up or mobile outreach may also be more effective. If a local meeting is not possible, consider reimbursing transportation costs for eligible participants or providing bus tickets.

- **Done in Partnerships:** Many community organizations enjoy great respect among the groups they serve, and are happy to help public agencies serve them as well. Doing outreach in partnership with local organization can lead to better results.



<https://thedistance.com/worlds-largest-laundromat/>

Recommended Strategies:

- **Trusted Advocates:** Hire outreach workers for specific demographics who are already respected members of that community. They can serve as liaisons that link the agency to the community by facilitating communication and recruiting participants at agency events.

- **Advisory Boards/Committees for Specific Populations:** Form a board comprised solely of members from a specific community or demographic. This group can serve to develop ideas for outreach to low-income communities or provide insightful guidance throughout the planning process.

- **“Laundry Day” Outreach:** Conducting outreach events or surveys in or near laundromats engages a captive audience, who are more likely to participate in surveys or Q and A sessions than people who are on their way to somewhere. The audience is also likely to be local, especially in major cities.

- **Key Person Interview :** Conducting interview with respected community leaders can help obtain information and insight into a specific community or issue. The key person may be an organization leader, elected official, media representative, faith leader, or someone else with standing in the target community.

- **Fund CBOs for Outreach:** Draw on the expertise of a Community-Based Organization (CBO) by funding them through small grants to help reach a target population.

- **Students Surveying Parents:** Elementary students can be assigned to interview family members about a local issue or transportation project.

- **Study Circles:** A study circle is a group of 8 to 12 people who meet regularly over a period of time to address a critical public issue in a democratic, collaborative way. Participants examine the issue from many points of view and identify areas of common ground, emerging with recommendations for action. Study circles can engage populations traditionally underserved by other outreach efforts, and can help address barriers to engagement that low-income communities face.

Example:

The City of Seattle uses Public Outreach Engagement Liaisons (POELs) to reach underserved communities, following the Trusted Advocates model described here. POELs have diverse backgrounds, language abilities, and skillsets so their role is adaptable to the needs of the agency. It is hoped that gained experience and training provided on specific skill sets will lead to participants not only being effective POELs, but also transitioning to community leadership roles beyond the POELs program.

Presenting a community member as liaison fosters confidence that community interests are being served. Greater trust leads to greater participation, which leads to more effective program implementation.

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

Millennials

Who They Are:

Millennials, also called Generation Y, are generally defined as people born between 1980 and 1998. In the United States, they comprise the largest and most racially diverse generation in history.

Many Millennials have been burdened by student loan debt and a large cohort of younger Millennials live with their parents to make ends meet. They use social media at high rates, drive less than in ages past, and expect convenience from most transactions.

Millennials are a very diverse generation with different needs. They are often under-represented in civic affairs due to inexperience, demands of balancing multiple jobs with school and family, and limited opportunities.



Best Practices:

Millennials span a large range of ages and life stages, from college students to young parents, and as such, strategies for engaging them will vary. In general outreach should be:

- **Social:** They tend to be attracted to social events or fun experiences that they can share with friends or on social media, and are more likely to attend an event if invited by a friend.
- **Appealing:** Millennials are accustomed to advanced graphic design and short, powerful messaging in marketing materials. They are less likely to engage with an organization with a wordy flyer or unattractive webpage, as it appears behind the times.
- **Brief:** Living in the information age, Millennials cannot respond to every survey that is offered to them. Surveys should be less than 10 questions and multiple-choice to maximize participation.
- **Good for Small Children:** Many older Millennials have young children. In pop-up outreach events, providing trinkets or games to attract their young children may encourage young parents to stop as well.
- **Relatable:** Even if approached by a stranger for outreach, Millennials relate better and feel less intimidated if the person is close to their age.
- **Helpful:** As with other groups, Millennials want to know how engaging will help them. Key issues of interest include transportation that will connect them to other places and finding jobs.
- **In the right format:** Millennials are likely to get information from social media, but usage varies. Older Millennials frequent Facebook, but the younger demographic prefers Snapchat. Many also use Twitter and Instagram.



Facts about Millennials



In 2016 they became the largest generation in the US¹



40% have children²



Their favorite social media platforms are Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat.³

Recommended Strategies

- **Transit on Tap:** Host monthly talks at different local bars or restaurants to discuss transportation issues and give a presentation in a place that feels more approachable and enjoyable to many people.
- **Better Block Projects:** Millennials are drawn to experiences over material goods, and are often the drivers between place-making and tactical urbanism projects. The Better Block Foundation offers open-sourced tools and ideas for revitalizing a neighborhood block from the ground up, even when resources are scarce.
- **Instagram:** Wildly popular photo and video sharing site, which can be used to post photos and other images. It offers a more approachable way for young users to engage with agencies by commenting on photos, and can help an agency establish credibility with younger citizens.
- **Civic Dinner Parties:** Residents host or attend dinner parties with friends and engage in guided conversation on particular topics affecting their community.
- **Citizen Advisory Committee:** A group of volunteers that meets regularly to discuss issues of common concern to a specific population and the governing body.
- **Social Pinpoint:** Map-based consultation platform for transportation and land use projects, including comment capability and data analytics.

Example

TriMet, the transit agency for the Portland, OR area, hosts monthly “Transit on Tap” events that fit with the local microbrew and pub culture. By hosting an event in a place that many people frequent anyway, the event is more approachable than a meeting at a municipal building, and even encourages friends to attend together. Many events share general information on a specific topic, such as transit history, but they also feature guest speakers, sneak peaks on new projects, or discussions on issues of relevance to transit riders.

www.trimet.org/ontap/

1. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/04/25/millennials-overtake-baby-boomers/>
 2. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/191462/gallup-analysis-millennials-marriage-family.aspx>
 3. <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/data/q1-2017/>

Minorities

Who They Are

Ethnic minorities, or people of color, include any people who do not identify racially as white, who may include Black, Latino, Asian, Middle Eastern, Native American or multiracial populations. They are an extremely diverse population with a range of communication styles and engagement levels. They are often underserved in public outreach because of economic disadvantage or lack of political organization. See also Tips and Best Practices sheets on Immigrants and Low-Income populations.

Example

New York City's "I am Muslim" campaign offers Know Your Rights tips for Muslims as well as training for employers on how to ensure that human rights of Muslims are protected at work.

<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/cchr/media/i-am-muslim.page>

Resource

<http://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/RSJI/GRE/IOPEguide01-11-12.pdf>



Best Practices

Outreach should be:

- **Rooted in the community:** An outreach worker who identifies with the community being served will be more effective and build a better rapport with residents than an outsider. Being from their neighborhood is often more important than being of the same race, though often many relate better to someone of their race or cultural background.
- **A Positive Reflection of the Community:** When directed towards a community of color, outreach materials should focus on the area's strengths, not just its opportunities for improvement.
- **Done in Partnership:** Many community organizations enjoy great respect among the groups they serve, and are happy to help public agencies serve them as well. Faith leaders, especially, may be involved with civic matters and encourage their congregations to do the same.
- **Relevant to the Family's Needs:** Showing how an issue will benefit an individual, their child, or a family member makes it more relevant to their daily lives.



Minority Groups in New Jersey

New Jersey is the 9th most racially diverse state in the US. Essex and Hudson are the most diverse NJ counties, while Jersey City, Atlantic City, and North Brunswick are the most diverse municipalities.¹

Recommended Strategies

- **Trusted Advocates:** Hire outreach workers for specific demographics who are already respected members of that community. They can serve as liaisons that link the agency to the community by facilitating communication and recruiting participants at agency events.
- **Advisory Boards/Committees for Specific Populations:** Form a board comprised solely of members from a specific community or demographic, who can serve to develop ideas for outreach to low-income communities.
- **Key Person Interviews:** Interview with a respected community leader with the goal of obtaining information and insight into a specific community or issue. The key person may be an organization leader, elected official, media representative, faith leader, or someone else with standing in the target community.
- **Visit Small Businesses in Person:** Visiting small businesses in person gives hard-working entrepreneurs a chance to engage without leaving their place of business, and can be a tool to form partnerships with local communities.
- **“Know Your Rights” Page:** A “Know your rights” page can be dedicated to sharing information with underserved communities regarding resources and procedures in place and their rights to access them. This can help ensure that all residents are able to participate in an agency’s programs and decision-making processes, and is especially important in communities with a history of being denied rights.
- **Use Local Media Outlets:** Some immigrant groups and other minority communities get their news primarily through ethnic or foreign language media outlets such as television and radio stations and newspapers offered in a particular language, such as Spanish or Arabic. Agencies should look into advertising their programs, projects, etc. through these means because they may be the only way to reach such audiences.
- **Pop-up Kiosks:** Bringing mobile outreach activities to places where people of color already gather will reach a larger and more diverse audience than traditional meetings, and fun or social activities provide an easy opportunity for attendees to participate. Cultural events and fairs in communities of color offer ample opportunities, including Chinese New Year, Day of the Dead, Diwali, African-American Day and various nations’ local Independence Day parades. Local chambers of commerce, cultural heritage committees, or ethnic newspapers may have details about planned local events.

1. http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2017/01/the_10_most_diverse_towns_in_new_jersey.html

List of Online Survey Tools in Database

Surveys and Elections

These are flexible tools that allow you to craft your own online survey for users to respond to at their leisure. They have varying levels of security and reach which lead to a variety of pricing options.

Election Buddy (#183)

<http://www.electionbuddy.com/>

Tool for small-scale elections that can also be used as a poll for issues of concern. Voting is anonymous and each ballot has one secure voting key to limit each person to one vote. Pricing depends on the number of voters, and is free for less than 20 voters.

Helios Voting (#203)

<https://vote.heliosvoting.org/>

Free voting system featuring verifiable and anonymous voting. Users log in via Google or Facebook. Anyone can administer an election and may keep it private or open it to the public, and may also set start and end times.

All Our Ideas (#242)

<http://allourideas.org/>

Simple, open sourced surveying tool for determining public priorities and concerns. Users are asked an open-ended question and then choose between two options at a time to show which option is more important to them. After several rounds of choosing between answers for the same question, options are repeated in different pairings to determine the user's priorities amongst a long list of options. Participants can also present new questions to other users. Data can be downloaded for analysis and integrated with Google Analytics.

Textizen (#247)

<http://www.textizen.com/>

Engagement platform that uses text messages to obtain public feedback. Simple questions can be advertised to the public inviting them to text a number to share their thoughts. Follow-up questions then obtain additional responses. The platform sends, receives, and analyzes interactive text messages. Costs range depending on how many text messages you receive.

Townhall Mobile App (#462)

<http://www.townhallapp.io/>

Engagement platform that uses text messages to obtain public feedback. Simple questions can be advertised to the public inviting them to text a number to share their thoughts. Follow-up questions then obtain additional responses. The platform sends, receives, and analyzes interactive text messages. Costs range depending on how many text messages you receive.

Survey Monkey (#38)

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/>

Simple, open sourced surveying tool for determining public priorities and concerns. Users are asked an open-ended question and then choose between two options at a time to show which option is more important to them. After several rounds of choosing between answers for the

same question, options are repeated in different pairings to determine the user's priorities amongst a long list of options. Participants can also present new questions to other users. Data can be downloaded for analysis and integrated with Google Analytics.

Live, real-time polls for meetings

These tools allow you to ask questions of a live audience for instant response and then display results in real-time.

Feedbackr (#195)

<https://www.feedbackr.io/>

Live polling and feedback tool for use during meetings and events. The tool administers surveys or single questions to audience members, who answer via smartphones or tablets. Results are collected instantly and are displayed graphically in real time for the audience to see. This tool helps create interactive meetings that allow participants to see how their opinion matches up against others'. Data can be exported to Google Sheets for further analysis. Pricing depends on the number of participants, with unlimited options available.

Poll Everywhere (#246)

<https://www.polleverywhere.com>

Text message-based, real time audience polling program for use at live events. It is similar in functionality to keypad polling, but without needing specific devices. Participants use their mobile phones. Various pricing plans are available.

Engagement Platforms with Polling Capabilities

These tools are comprehensive engagement platforms offering a range of services, such as project websites, maps, forums, and contact lists. Polls are one feature of these services, but cannot be used individually. Pricing reflects the wide scope of services offered.

EngagementHQ (#279)

<http://engagementhq.com/>

All-in-one engagement platform that includes capabilities for surveys and quick polls along with a host of other engagement tools. Polls can be easily integrated into the project site or turned on and off as needed.

Cityzen (#244)

<http://cityzenpolls.com/citizen-engagement-software/>

Interactive polling and social media management software designed for governments to create fast, attractive polls and target online outreach more effectively. Polling is one tool in the suite of tools designed to streamline public engagement. Various pricing plans are available.

Op-Eds and Letters to the Editor

An opinion-editorial is a 600-800 word essay that makes a clear, convincing argument about a relevant current event or issue, offering a unique perspective not found in the mainstream news coverage.

Selecting a potential op-ed topic

Make it current: newspapers look to guest op-eds for a unique perspective on current events – i.e. that week. Discussions of broad cultural trends are left to regular columnists.

Bring a unique perspective: what side of the story is the media not telling? Try to shed new light on a topic that's receiving a lot of attention in the news. Don't be afraid to have strong opinions.

Plan ahead: if you know a relevant event (e.g. a Supreme Court decision, or legislative vote) is on the horizon that you think would be appropriate, flag it as early as possible and begin drafting.

Be strategic about timing: most papers won't publish an op-ed from the same organization more than once every 6 months, so think carefully about which stories you want to pitch where, and when.

Think local: getting into a national, top-tier paper is not only extremely unlikely (e.g. NYT only takes ~15% of their op-eds from public submissions), but it may be less effective. If the story has a local or state angle, the chances of it getting printed and getting read by the right people are much higher at the local level.

Planning content

Consider making it personal: If you or someone else in the organization has a personal experience or tie to the issue at hand, use it. These can make for compelling, first-hand arguments.

Be ready to move quickly: Time is of the essence with op-eds, so the drafting, review, revision, and approval process has to operate within a short timeframe. If there are several people in your organization who must sign off before submission, let them know a draft is coming soon.

Composing a successful op-ed

Introduction

Engaging lead: the first line(s) should capture the reader's attention and introduce the topic.

Clear argument: an op-ed hangs on one central argument/thesis, so put this forth early on.

Overall tone: be succinct, avoid jargon, and write in a conversational style.

Body

Support your opinion: illustrate this thesis with approximately three supporting points or insights, and support these insights with hard evidence (data, research, recent events, local examples, etc).

Address the counterpoint: use one paragraph to briefly address criticisms or counterpoints.

Conclusion

End with a strong CTA: each op-ed should end with a call-to-action (CTA), pointing to what needs to happen now (court case overturned, legislation passed, etc). Statements of general support or outrage will lack the specific and actionable point of view papers are looking for.

Alternatives to an op-ed

Letter to the editor: a 250-400 word essay that responds directly to an article published in a given newspaper that week. They can be much easier to place than op-eds, and given their length, can be a lighter lift to turn around quickly. Ideally they should be submitted within 24 to 48 hours.

Blogs: know the important blogs in your field and their guidelines for submission. Be ready to draft and submit quickly.

Overcome Barriers to Youth Engagement

The reality today is that most positions of power are held by adults. So this is our challenge to you – adults with any kind of power: take youth engagement to the next level. Many of you are already working to try to engage more young people, and no doubt this is a step in the right direction. But, you may be running across challenges you haven't found solutions for yet. We've compiled a list of five common challenges, along with possible solutions you can implement right away.

It's important to note that young people aren't the only ones that might face some of these challenges. When you address these barriers, you're being inclusive of many groups of people.

Challenge #1: Scheduling conflicts

Everyone is busy, including young people. They have packed schedules with school, extracurricular activities, work, and helping out at home. Some may be responsible for caring for younger siblings, or they may have young children of their own. If they are going to be giving up some of their time, they need to know it will be time well spent.

Possible Solutions

Recognize that "young people" as a group are very diverse –they have different levels of education, racial/ethnic backgrounds, and lifestyles. Think about the group you're trying to reach and the scheduling challenges they might face. Evenings and/or weekends might be the best time to meet for many people. But, it depends on the group.

If you're looking to recruit high school and college students, get in contact with a club at the school or on campus. If the club aligns with the goal of your project, they may be willing to devote some time to recruiting or organizing an event.

Research shows that people are more willing to commit to a large task after agreeing to a small one. Think about some ways young people could contribute without committing to a time-consuming meeting schedule. Perhaps you're trying to make sure your kick-off event is appealing to a younger crowd. You could solicit comments and suggestions from groups you're already connected with through a poll or online forum. After they've completed a small task, follow up by asking for a larger commitment. This tactic of asking for a small commitment first works for recruiting volunteers of other ages as well.

Challenge #2: Experience barriers

It is often assumed that more experience is always better. In addition, certain types of experiences like attending certain schools or working in a particular profession tend to be valued more than others. These values and assumptions privilege only certain types of experiences and they don't leave room for young people. We need to recognize that young people do have valuable skills and knowledge and make room for different kinds and levels of experience.

This overemphasis on experience can affect recruiting, but it can also play out in meetings. Here's an example: A young person suggests an idea for a flyer design. Then, a more experienced group mem-

ber has a different idea and adds, “I have 25 years of experience in publishing, so we should go with my idea.” This automatically dismisses the ideas and skills of young people and shuts them out of the conversation. How could they possibly compete with someone that has 25 years of experience?

Possible Solutions

- Aim to include people with a range of skills and knowledge in your group, instead of focusing only on those with many years of experience.
- Acknowledge that young people do have knowledge and skills to contribute, even if they don’t have related professional experience.
- Make it clear in a job description or in an invitation that young people are encouraged to apply or attend a meeting.
- Be explicit that no experience is necessary to join, if that’s the case.
- When people are in disagreement over an idea, allow each person to pitch it to the group and bring it to a vote, instead of allowing one person to dominate the conversation.

Challenge #3: Young people have a limited voice in meetings

As a young person, it can be intimidating to speak up in a group of adults, especially since young people are often outnumbered in meetings. Once they are at the table, it’s important to create an environment of respect that allows their voice to be heard.

Possible Solutions

- Set ground rules that you agree on as a group. Make sure the rules will make space for a respectful conversation.
- Practice active listening. As a group, talk about what it means to be an active listener. Consider doing a listening activity during one of your meetings.
- Before moving on to another topic, ask if people who haven’t talked yet have any additional questions or comments.

Challenge #4: There is a racial gap between younger and older generations

The demographics in communities across the country are changing as younger generations become more diverse. This might present a recruiting challenge since you’ll have to be conscious of how to recruit young people and people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds at the same time.

Possible Solutions

When you’re strategizing about how to recruit young people, consider using targeted messages for different groups. Find a teacher, youth group leader, or community member that can be a liaison between your current coalition and the group you’re trying to reach.

Once you have built a relationship with some younger members of your community, work together to recruit more. Take their lead on what messages might resonate with a younger, more diverse crowd.

Be open to talking about race. Pretending it doesn’t exist or that it doesn’t impact the issue you’re trying to address can make people of color feel like outsiders. Consider using session one of our Facing Racism in a Diverse Nation discussion guide to open up the conversation.

Challenge #5: Making meetings and events appealing to young people

Inviting young people to attend bi-monthly organizing meetings with a group of adults is going to be a hard sell. It's important to think about what aspects of the program you want youth to be engaged in, and then brainstorm strategies to achieve your goal. If young people currently do not attend any meetings or events, it may be too ambitious to recruit them for every aspect of the project right away.

Possible Solutions

Many young people are looking for something meaningful to put on a resume. Let them know how this experience will help them and assign real projects to lead and contribute to. Let them know you can be a reference for them. If they can't commit to something long-term, think of a one-time activity they could be a part of.

Have a group of young people responsible for organizing a certain aspect of an event they're interested in. That way, they feel ownership of the project and the event will be more likely to attract other young people.

Use events as a recruiting tool. You can either host an event specifically for young people, or make an effort to incorporate activities into general event that would attract that age group. Some ideas include inviting a local band with young members to play at an event, incorporating a volunteer component, or hosting an art competition.

Challenge #6: Transportation

Young people may not have a car they can use on a regular basis, or even a license. Your recruitment efforts won't be successful unless they have a way to travel to the meeting place.

Possible Solutions

- Schedule meetings and events in locations that are easily accessible by public transportation.
- Consider meeting spaces at a local school or college campus, or at least within walking distance of one.

When inviting people to meetings, be sure to let them know up front how you're addressing transportation issues. That way, people won't decline a meeting invitation based on the fact that they might not have a car.

Challenge #7: The same young people are always invited

It's easy for existing group members to invite their friends or family members to a meeting. Often times this is the most effective tactic to boost membership. However, if you're not intentional about inviting a diverse group of people, it's easy for the group to be homogeneous.

Here's an example: You're trying to include more young people in your effort, so group members ask their children to join. If there are two generations of members, they likely share the same or similar background. While you may recruit a lot of enthusiastic young members by asking their children to join, you won't be adding to the diversity of the team if you're not recruiting young people in other ways.

Even if group members aren't related, sometimes the same young people are consistently invited to be a part of community events. Here's an example: you regularly reach out to a student government group at a local college to recruit young people. This is a logical place to recruit – the students are motivated enough to participate in extracurricular activities, and they are likely interested in civic engagement. However, only reaching out to the most obvious group means that you may not bring much diversity into your team.

Possible Solutions

- To make space at the table for different youth perspectives, reach out to local schools, colleges, community centers, youth groups, and other places where young people are.
- When reaching out to student and youth groups, don't stop with student council and student government. Have you reached out to the Black Student Alliance? The statistics club? Tutoring services?
- In addition to getting recommendations from adults, also ask the young people in the group to suggest someone to join the effort. This gives young people a voice in decision-making even before they come to your meeting.

Challenge #8: Allowing young people to try something that didn't work in the past

It would be impossible to follow up on every idea people proposed. However, many times adults quickly dismiss ideas because "we've tried that before." Young people are more likely to suggest things that have already been tried since they were not around to hear about it the first time. When we invite young people to come to the table, we need to also make space to express their ideas and opinions.

Possible Solutions

Give everyone a fair chance to explain an idea. Perhaps once you hear more details you'll discover that it's not exactly the same as what's already been tried. They may have a different way of implementing the idea. Or, the timing might be better and there's a good chance it will be successful at this point.

If you listened to the idea but still don't think it would be in the program's best interest to implement it, be sure to explain why. Simply saying "no" without an explanation can lead to misunderstandings. They might think that you're dismissing the idea just because of their age, experience, skills, etc.

Make sure you're honest about why you don't want to implement an idea. If it is clearly not aligned with your program's goals, or if there is a significant barrier such as funding, say no after you've sincerely listened to their suggestion.

On the other hand, if you were responsible for a similar project that didn't work out in the past, make sure your pride doesn't affect your opinion. Instead, be a mentor and have a conversation about challenges you faced in the past. In hindsight, you may have implemented your idea in a different way. Be open about what you learned from past attempts so other people don't make the same mistakes. And if you work together, you can share the success.

Challenge #9: Young people may not be aware of unspoken norms

Many of the norms your group follows likely come from working with groups of adults and/or work settings. Young people have limited experience in both of those areas. This can have an impact on things such as what experience to highlight when applying for a position, how to format emails, understanding what certain terms mean, or how to interject in a discussion.

Possible Solutions

Sometimes we perpetuate certain norms just because we've always done it a certain way, even if it might not be the most efficient way of doing things anymore. Be open to new ways of doing things. Having new people in the group can be refreshing and can help you work more effectively, so take advantage of this opportunity. It might be helpful to develop group norms together for things like how to run meetings or how to communicate with each other.

It may be helpful to ask young people if and how they'd like to get up to speed on the topics of con-

versation or how things are run. Make some suggestions, but let them decide what they think will work best. And, some may feel that they don't need any guidance at the moment. Here are some ideas you could run by them:

- Before moving on to a new topic, ask if people who haven't talked yet have any additional questions or comments.
- Set aside time just after the meeting to answer questions people might have about terms or logistics.
- Pair up a young person and a more experienced person to be "buddies." Young people can have the opportunity to learn more about the topic or how things are run, and those who are more experienced can gain a better understanding of the perspectives of young people.

Challenge #10: Understanding how young people can contribute

The idea that young people don't have as much to contribute as adults is ingrained in our culture. And as adults, we often perpetuate the same things adults told us when we were young. Young people of all ages can make a contribution whether they go to school, work in a grocery store, or are a small business owner.

Think of your grown daughter, son, niece, or nephew. You knew them as a child, and now that they're a young adult, it can be easy to fall into old habits. Now that they've grown up, it may be hard to transition to allowing them to make decisions on their own without your judgment. And, you may find that you treat other young people in a similar way even if they aren't your family members.

Possible Solutions

Change your frame: instead of thinking that young people are at a deficit because they don't have much experience, start seeing the opportunity for young people to build skills at a young age by contributing to your efforts.

We all have things to learn; young people and adults can learn from each other. As with any group member, find out what they're good at and challenge them to take it to the next level. If they are on the debate team, perhaps they'd be interested in helping to develop messages. If they are technically savvy, they may be able to help with some of the technical logistics of an event.

Treat young people like they can be leaders as they are. Recognize that they can be leaders now, even though there is still room for growth. Think about it: even students as young as middle school could have experience that would be valuable to your effort. Some play sports, compete in music contests and speech tournaments, run for student government, or organize volunteer events. They are already leaders; this is just another opportunity to strengthen those skills.

Senior Citizens

Example

The South Florida Regional Transportation Authority, or Tri-Rail, holds an annual singing competition for talented singers age 65 and older, Senior Idol, as part of their commitment to senior citizens. The contest begins with an open audition, free of charge, from which 12 finalists are selected for a final competition at a major venue. The winner receives \$500 and one year of free rides.

The event saw over 500 participants in its first five years and has become a much-talked about event for seniors throughout the region. Tri-Rail won an AdWheel award from the American Public Transportation Association in 2011 for this innovative public engagement technique.

<http://www.tri-rail.com/senior-idol-2015/index.asp>



Who They Are

Senior citizens are generally considered 65 and older, and include members of both the Baby Boomer and the Silent generations, a large but aging population.

Seniors often spend time volunteering, caring for grandchildren, or pursuing hobbies, while others may still work part time. They may also frequent community gathering places like senior centers as well as restaurants, grocery stores, and movie theaters at earlier hours, when they can receive special discounts and crowds are smaller.

Seniors use technology to varying degrees – 48% of those over 65 use Facebook – but in general they use it less than younger generations and rely more on other methods of communication.

Seniors are often very involved in their communities and feel a strong sense of civic duty, voting at the highest rates of any age group. In spite of this, seniors may be underrepresented in planning efforts because of mobility challenges, lack of relevance to their lives, or lack of awareness about issues primarily promoted on the Internet.

See also the Tips and Best Practices sheet for Special Needs populations, which pertains to seniors with disabilities.



Best Practices

- **Accessible:** In addition to being ADA accessible, events should be held during daylight hours as many seniors try to avoid traveling at night. Printed materials should be in large print or if on screen, should include an option to enlarge the font.
- **In a Variety of Formats:** Seniors are not “digital natives” and many prefer to obtain information by word of mouth or from newspapers, US Mail, or television rather than computers and smart phones. Though many seniors do use technology such as Facebook to communicate with family, they may not be sure how to use it to engage with public agencies so it should not be the sole method used.
- **Close to Home:** Many seniors find travel difficult or have fear about navigating unfamiliar places. Outreach at a senior gathering place will engage more people in a way that is convenient and comfortable for them.
- **Online:** Many seniors over age 65 are increasingly embracing social media platforms such as Facebook (48%), LinkedIn (21%) and Pinterest (17%) as retirement affords them more free time. Reaching out through Facebook groups focused on hobbies of interest to seniors or creating images or surveys that are easily shared among friends and family can reach seniors with a presence on social media.

Recommended Strategies

- **Provide Transportation to Meetings:** Providing transportation can help solve the issues faced by seniors with limited mobility who would like to participate in activities but lack transportation.
- **Advisory Committees/Boards for Specific Populations** To gain more specific insight and feedback from people with special needs, consider forming an advisory board of members of that community. Generally, these advisory boards are voluntary in nature but have formal or semi-formal meetings on a monthly or bi-monthly basis.
- **Pop-up Kiosks:** Bringing pop-up outreach activities to places where seniors gather requires less marketing than a traditional meeting and can help overcome mobility-related barriers to participation. Visual preferences surveys, maps, or activities can be brought to senior centers, grocery stores, and other senior gathering spots.
- **Use Social Media:** Promoting your agency through social media groups or Pinterest boards can help reach seniors who are interested in your issues. Facebook can also help connect to other organizations working with seniors, such as Senior Planet.
- **Senior Idol:** Offer a singing contest for seniors that serves as a gathering space and a chance to increase your agency’s visibility while providing information about pertinent planning issues. The winner can win free transit rides or cash.

Special Needs

Who They Are:

Special needs people may experience any number of cognitive or physical disabilities. This could include hearing or vision loss, autism, neurological diseases, loss of limb function, or developmental delays, among many others. Because the range of needs is so broad, agencies should be aware of the myriad of ways in which people with special needs may be excluded from traditional public outreach, and how to correct for it.



Best Practices

- Physically Welcoming:** Meeting spaces should be fully ADA accessible and any materials available should be reachable and visible from a seated wheelchair position. In addition, the area surrounding the meeting area should be safe and free of debris or sidewalk cracks that could pose a danger to a person with limited mobility or vision, and ADA entrances should be clearly marked. If meeting inside a room, volunteer escorts near curbs and stairs can help participants feel welcomed.
- Visually and Audibly Accessible:** Large print and high-contrast displays and presentations and a good sound system will help ensure that all guests can see and hear as much as possible.
- Sensitive to their Needs:** Staff should be trained on how to be sensitive to the unique needs of this population. For example, when leading a blind person, staff should offer their elbow so the person can hold it in a way that they feel is comfortable. This affords a blind person greater ability to intuit their leader's movements, as well as greater dignity than being held by the hand or pushed from behind. Also, staff should ask before assisting someone and should honor their request if they deny assistance.
- Developmentally Appropriate:** Adults with only physical disabilities that have typical cognitive functioning should be spoken to at the same level as the general population. A person with a disability may forever be turned off from participation if they feel they were talked down to merely because they use a wheelchair. While some adults with cognitive disabilities will require simpler language and more personalized attention, they can still be spoken to and physically treated as adults; staff should avoid speaking in high voices or patting on the head, for example.



Recommended Strategies

- **Adapt documents for Use with Screen Readers:** A screen reader is a software program that either reads text aloud using a speech synthesizer or translates it to a refreshable braille display. Providing documents in an accessible format allows blind or visually impaired people using screen readers to read documents online, giving them full access to your content.
- **Advisory Boards/Committees for Specific Populations:** To gain more specific insight and feedback from people with special needs, consider forming an advisory board of members of that community. Generally, these advisory boards are voluntary in nature but have formal or semi-formal meetings on a monthly or bi-monthly basis.
- **Accessibility Audit Tool:** This tool is designed for mobile GIS devices and allows citizens to easily map their neighborhood streets based on their friendliness to people with disabilities.
- **Tip Sheets for Interacting with Persons with Disabilities:** Many organizations publish tips on best practices for serving the special needs community with dignity.
- **Advertise with Radio Reading Services:** These services are offered by many public radio stations, universities, or libraries that read books, news, or magazines aloud to blind or visually impaired people, and provide an opportunity for targeted advertising.
- **Offer Assistance for the Hearing Impaired:** Use TTY numbers, interpreters, and text messaging or email to keep hearing impaired residents in the know and engaged.

Example

Alameda-Contra Costa Transit (AC Transit) hosts an Accessibility Advisory Committee specifically comprised of seniors and people with disabilities. The Committee meets monthly to provide feedback of how they will be affected by proposed policies or actions. Committee members are offered free transit passes to participate, and aside from that incentive, costs of operating the Committee and staff time requirements are relatively low. AC Transit recommends keeping a mix of newer and more experienced participants on the Committee as well as setting the expectation that the Committee's role is advisory, not regulatory.

<http://www.actransit.org/accessibility-advisory-committee-aac/>

Other Resources

http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp_syn_85.pdf

<https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Make-your-Word-documents-accessible-d9bf3683-87ac-47ea-b91a-78dcacb3c66d>

<http://web1.ctaa.org/web-modules/webarticles/article-files/planninginclusivemeetings.pdf>