

QUICKNOTES

Inclusive Planning Processes

Inclusive planning incorporates plan-making and implementation processes where all community members feel welcome to participate and are confident that their participation can positively affect outcomes. Inclusion entails more than extending an open invitation to all community members. Planners and local officials must take the time to learn how systemic inequities and a lack of trust created by years of structural racism and discriminatory practices can affect the willingness and ability of different populations and interest groups to participate in planning processes. And they must be willing to change participation methods and techniques to maximize inclusivity.

BACKGROUND

Planners and local officials often associate public engagement with a specific project or task (e.g., an update to the local comprehensive plan), rather than making public engagement a continuous, long-term process. Additionally, they have traditionally relied heavily on input gathered through outreach to groups representing homeowners and community boosters to shape official plans. Through their testimony at public hearings, representatives of these same groups have often had an outsized effect on land use and development, program design, and capital investment decisions.

Historically, this traditional approach to public participation in planning processes has excluded or undervalued the perspectives and experiences of renters, lower-income households, people experiencing homelessness, people of color, non-English speakers, youths, single-parent families, and other marginalized populations. Consequently, planning decisions have often reinforced existing power structures, leading to development outcomes and resource allocations that favor higher-income single-family neighborhoods and regionally significant business districts.

In contrast, a growing number of communities are embracing inclusive planning processes that build civic trust and social capital and increase the likelihood of an equitable distribution of community benefits. To achieve these aims, planners and local officials must be willing to listen to new voices, acknowledge past mistakes, embrace alternative participation methods, and share authority.

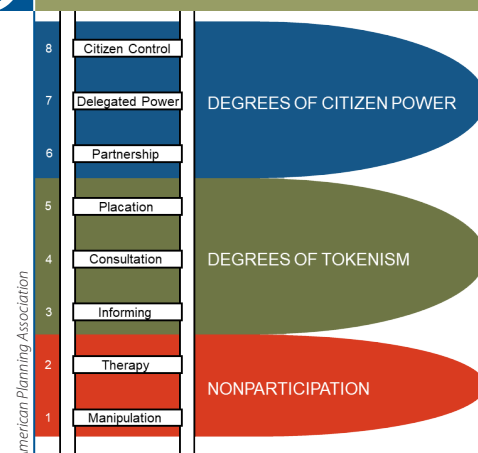
LEARN ABOUT THE COMMUNITY

Local elected officials may have a distorted view of their constituents based on who visits their offices or attends public hearings. While planners may have a more accurate impression of community composition based on demographic and geographic analyses, they may be out of touch with the lived experiences of different populations and interest groups.

Although gathering and analyzing quantitative data is important, planners and local officials also need to monitor social media platforms, hyperlocal news outlets, and community services and events listings to familiarize themselves with issues and opportunities that seldom surface in official public meetings. Community members often have different perceptions of neighborhood boundaries and perspectives on assets and institutions. Often, the only way to compile a complete picture of the community is by combining traditional community analysis techniques with conversations with members of different populations and identity groups in the settings in which they feel most comfortable.

BUILD TRUST WITH THE COMMUNITY

Many communities have a legacy of segregation and inequality that has prevented or eroded trust in local government. This lack of trust leads to low levels of civic participation and social capital and is associated with social isolation and negative health outcomes.



Inclusive planning processes sit on the highest rungs of Sherry Arnstein's "Ladder of Citizen Participation" (1969).



American Planning Association
Planning Advisory Service

Creating Great Communities for All

To build trust, planners and local officials must be willing to assess the local government's capacity, limitations, history, and power dynamics. They must also be willing to listen to community members talk about the shortcomings of previous planning processes.

Planners and local officials can initiate these conversations by contacting representatives of institutions, businesses, and community-based organizations that serve diverse populations and interest groups. Typically, this is an iterative process. Planners and local officials can ask each representative they contact for a list of other individuals or organizations they should engage. In some cases, local governments may need to enlist the aid of experienced community organizers to supplement staff capacity and expertise or to overcome high levels of distrust.

REMOVE BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

For marginalized community members, the list of potential barriers to participating in any given planning activity is extensive—including a lack of awareness, perceived relevance, or free time; poor transportation or broadband access; childcare or work schedule conflicts; and low language or technological proficiency. To maximize inclusion, planners and local officials must take steps to make participation possible, convenient, and rewarding.

From a practical perspective, this means planners and local officials need to use a wide range of engagement strategies and participation techniques. These include statutorily required public hearings, multilingual communitywide and neighborhood-based workshops, and online tools and platforms that allow community members to virtually attend meetings or to provide feedback and ideas in ways and at times that work for them. Often, there are opportunities to pair planning activities with street fairs, festivals, or meetings hosted by other governmental agencies or community-based organizations. Finally, providing transit passes, free food, and childcare can remove some of the most common barriers to participation.

COLLABORATE AND EMPOWER

Beyond feeling welcome to participate, all community members must have confidence that their contributions can positively affect outcomes. This means participants must have opportunities to collaborate with planners and local officials to build consensus on a vision for community change and to select strategies and actions to implement that vision.

Planners and local officials can also explore opportunities to share power with community members. One example is participatory budgeting, where community members vote on capital budget priorities in their district, ward, or neighborhood service area. When sharing power, planners and local officials must take precautions to ensure new decision-making structures truly represent pluralistic communities. Otherwise, privileged groups may take control of these structures and reinforce existing power dynamics.

CONCLUSIONS

Inclusive planning processes are necessary to rebuild trust and address inequitable conditions. Inclusion is also a necessary ingredient for social cohesion, which is associated with better mental and physical health outcomes. The challenge for planners and public officials, though, is to use inclusive processes to ensure that future land use and development, program design, and capital investment decisions produce equitable outcomes. This requires identifying and monitoring performance indicators that provide insight into the quality of engagement efforts and the distribution of community benefits.

PAS QuickNotes (ISSN 2169-1940) is a publication of the American Planning Association's Planning Advisory Service (PAS). Visit PAS online at planning.org/pas to find out how PAS can work for you. Joel Albizo, FASAE, CAE, Chief Executive Officer; Petra Hurtado, PhD, Research Director; David Morley, AICP, Editor. © 2019 American Planning Association, which has offices at 205 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1200, Chicago, IL 60601-5927, and 1030 15th St., NW, Suite 750 West, Washington, DC 20005-1503; planning.org. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means without permission in writing from APA.

FURTHER READING

Published by the American Planning Association

American Planning Association. 2019. Planning for Equity Policy Guide. Available at planning.org/policy/guides/adopted/equity.

Garcia, Ivis, Andrea Garfinkel-Castro, and Deidre Pfeiffer. 2019. *Planning With Diverse Communities*. PAS Report No. 593. Chicago: American Planning Association. Available at planning.org/publications/report/9165143.

Smith, Kendra L. 2019. "More and Better: Increasing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Planning." *PAS Memo*, May/June. Available at planning.org/publications/document/9176238.

Other Resources

Gardner, Jennifer. 2018. *Inclusive Healthy Places: A Guide to Inclusion & Health in Public Space*. New York: Gehl Institute. Available at <http://bit.ly/2mjX9GY>.

Institute for Local Government. 2019. "Inclusive Public Engagement." Available at ca-ilg.org/inclusive-public-engagement.