

*Survey Says: How to make deals, avoid family feuds,
escape jeopardy and spin the wheel of fortune*



Citizen Engagement For Local Governments

Presentation by Ted Townsend, City of Richmond

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Why engage?

- It allows government to tap the widest source of knowledge and talent possible
- It alerts policy makers to any concerns and issues not picked up through existing research.
- It helps to monitor existing policy and identify whether changes are needed.
- It empowers the community and creates ownership, pride and confidence in their local governance.
- Both policy-makers and the public benefit through greater understanding, collaboration and trust.

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The perils of disengagement

Without true public participation, the public can become frustrated or angry – resulting in a lose/lose situation, with costly expenditures for all involved:

- Incredible staff time and resources needed to deal with public objections
- Resources used to appease an angry public cannot be allocated to other pressing problems.



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The perils of disengagement

- Embattled leaders, managers and staff will begin to perform less effectively, take less risks and think less creatively.
- Opportunity costs include lost time and effort as well as ideas.
- Public benefits can be lost forever.

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A principled approach

- 1) Provide public access to accurate and **timely** information. **Accessible** through a variety of means.
- 2) **Include** the public by letting them know about, and contribute to, decisions that may impact them and showing them their input is valued.
- 3) Recognize the **legitimacy** of public concerns (truly consider feedback in your decision-making).
- 4) Recognize that individuals, business and special interest groups participate in an equal role.

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Who should you engage?

First question to ask is who will be impacted?

How will they react to what is being proposed?

Who will be supporters? Who will be opponents?

How can you bridge differences of opinion?

What stance is best for achieving project goals?



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Levels of participation

Not every proposal or policy warrants the same amount of public participation.

You must establish the framework of your particular project in order to determine the appropriate level of participation.

Determining the right approach is not only critical to success of the current project, but will impact on your credibility with the public on future projects.

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How will you engage?

1. Information giving

Providing detailed information on what is happening, its pros, cons and implications to the public.

2. Public Consultation

Offer a number of options; obtain, record and consider the public feedback.

3. Deciding together

Encourage others to provide some additional ideas and options, and join in deciding the best way forward.

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How will you engage? (2)

4. Acting together

Different interests decide together what is best, and they also form a partnership to carry it out.

5. Supporting independent community initiatives

Help others do what they want – perhaps within a framework of grants, advice and support.

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How to manage process

- Some people will want or demand more involvement than others.

- Others will wish not to be involved.

Simply accepting this can jeopardize your process:

- Important stakeholders may not be heard.

- You may be hijacked by vocal minority.

- Public participation can be minimal.



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Legitimacy



The effectiveness of your engagement will be driven by the public's perception of its legitimacy – providing them with an effective opportunity for input.

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Legitimacy (2)

If judged as dishonest, inept or incomplete it:

- will damage your credibility,
both for the current process and future consultations; and;
- can also lead to a disruptive public controversy and may
even lead to political fallout.

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Gaining trust

- Be clear on what you are asking and your stance.
- Conduct with complete transparency.
- Deliver material and hold meetings at times that are suitable and convenient for your participants.
- Be clear on what has already been decided and what is open for input.
- Ensure participants understand the process and how their input will be used to shape future decision-making.

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Earning trust (2)

- Ensure the public is satisfied with the level of participation at which they are involved.
- Understand different levels of interest: some don't have much at stake and may be happy to be informed. Others will want to be involved in decisions. The more people you can involve in the process the more credible it will be.

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Communication is essential

Every engagement requires a communications plan:

- Determine your audiences, assess their expected reactions, develop desired outcomes and determine how you will engage public
- Select the best methods to reach targeted audiences to share information and encourage and engage participants. A variety of methods and approaches may be needed at different times in the process.
- Be creative. Consider non-traditional tools such as social media as a way to reach, and engage different audiences.

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Communication is essential (2)

- Avoid jargon and too much technical detail when consulting/communicating with public. Information should be in plain, concise and easily digestible language and clear, simple visuals that everyone can understand.
- Don't just rely on paid advertisements and other official communications. News coverage can help greatly in spurring discussion and understanding of issues. It can also be damaging if you do not take a pro-active role in helping the media to do their jobs well.

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Communication is essential (3)

- Information on issues can become public before you expect. Identify spokespeople on issue early and provide them, Council and other spokespeople with background info, key messages and FAQs.
- Reach out to all stakeholders early in process and offer them opportunities to become engaged in the process.
- Do not unilaterally count on stakeholder representatives to ensure your process is thorough.

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A tactical approach

- public meetings
- committee / stakeholder meetings
- public surveys /questionnaires/feedback forms
- e-mail and online surveys
- public display, road shows and exhibitions
- web forums, blogs and other social media
- focus groups
- market research

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Spreading the word

- advertisements
- community meetings/exhibitions
- posters, brochures & leaflets
- website and social media
- news releases and media briefings
- videos (CD, DVD, memory stick)
- partner outreach and third party champions

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Let's get social

Social media offers great promise for more engagement:

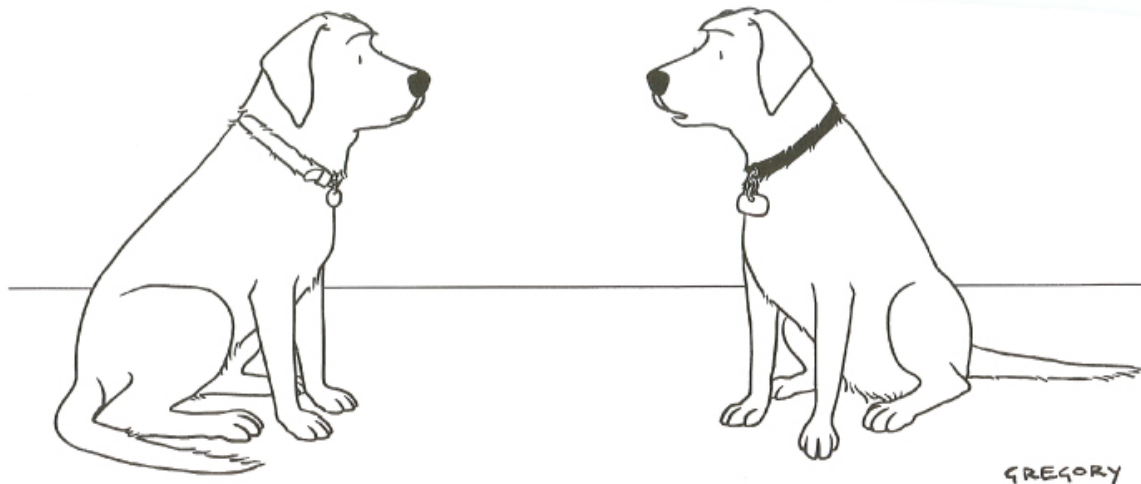
- Many social media channels all provide avenues for two-way engagement. It's interactive, provides 24/7 accessibility, can reach broader audience.
- Just as with other engagement need to build trust. Need to be responsive and open and communicate clearly.
- It is not free.
- Be careful what you ask for.



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Let's get social

- Participation may not be what you expect.
- Still tends to be dominated by same vocal minority.



*"I had my own blog for a while, but I decided to go
back to just pointless, incessant barking."*

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Closing the circle

After public engagement is complete:

- Analyze the public response and incorporate into report summarizing the public process and findings and document all feedback received
- Consider what has been learnt and incorporate these views into the plan.
- Prepare a written summary of response and make public. If specific stakeholders were invited to participate in the consultation, send them a copy of the final summary report and advise on Council discussions/deliberations.

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Getting to yes

**It is just as important to communicate after public
consultation as it is before**

**LET'S MAKE
A DEAL[®]**

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Resources

Lawrence Susskind & Patrick Field, *Dealing with an Angry Public, The Mutual Gains Approach to Resolving Disputes*, The Free Press, © 1996

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