

November 17, 2025

MEMO TO: David Raatz, Director of Council Services

F R O M: James Krueger, Senior Legislative Analyst *JK*
Megan Moniz, Legislative Attorney *MM*

SUBJECT: **“BETTER PUBLIC MEETINGS” TRAINING SERIES** (PAF 25-248)

We attended the International City/County Management Association’s “Better Public Meetings” training series. This four-part online workshop was conducted on September 10, September 17, September 24, and October 1, 2025, on planning and facilitating public meetings. The participant guides that we received for each workshop are appended as exhibits.

“Navigating the Challenges of Public Meetings”; Exhibit 1

The series’ first part focused on:

- the challenges government officials face when conducting public meetings,
- the ramifications of poorly run public meetings, and
- what government officials can consider to improve meetings.

Workshop participants shared the challenges they encountered during their work and raised concerns about impatience, incivility, disruptive behavior, and disinterest from the public. While these behaviors may stem from more than just bad public meetings, improving public meetings may mitigate them.

Improving public meetings starts with considering what it takes for people to be heard—and to feel that they are heard. Closing the feedback loop by informing the public how their input impacts decisions and providing official responses from government officials on behalf of institutions are some ways to show people they are being heard.

“Designing Effective Public Meetings”; Exhibit 2

The next part reviewed considerations for designing and organizing more effective public meetings, including testimony processes and other public feedback.

Thoughtful preparation occurring before and after the meeting contributes to making the meeting more effective. Effective asynchronous public-input opportunities—like surveys and forums—can help government officials learn more on community perspectives before the meeting. Officials should consider facilitating pre-meeting dialogue through crowdsourcing.

After the meeting, effectively communicating what decisions were made and what actions will be taken as a result of the decision informs the public as to what is happening, which helps to build trust and fosters future civic engagement. Providing the public the opportunity to submit feedback can also help government officials with creating more effective meetings in the future.

The training went over ideas of how to make public-comment periods more effective. Many ideas may not be applicable to the Maui County Council because they may conflict with Hawai‘i’s Sunshine Law. But some considerations that are applicable include:

- allowing for the availability of asynchronous testimony submission; and
- ensuring public feedback is referenced and considered when decisions are made.

“Facilitating Civil, Effective Meetings”; Exhibit 3

The series’ third part centered on facilitating public meetings and provided helpful tools and techniques to consider.

The use of physical space for creating a functional environment during meetings was highlighted as an important consideration for facilitators. In this context, a facilitator may be the presiding officer at an official public meeting or a moderator of an informal community meeting.

The way a room is set up conveys the kind of meeting that will unfold. Consideration of power dynamics and making the room less intimidating can create a space that promotes collegiality.

For example, if everyone is facing toward one speaker, people anticipate a lecture-style meeting. On the other hand, chairs arranged in small groups will lead to discussion.

Facilitators should also consider framing the issues that will be discussed to help participants with better understanding. Structuring what is being discussed and the possibilities or outcomes being studied can guide discussion more productively. Facilitators who work to ensure a level of understanding in the fairest way possible will see better civic engagement.

Accessibility considerations are also important. Considering the community's diverse needs by providing services such as real-time and on-site translation, child care, transportation, and food will encourage more public participation.

“Improving Engagement Before, After, and Alongside Public Meetings”; Exhibit 4

The series concluded with a section on public engagement. The presenters shared methods for getting the public to meetings and then how to involve them once present.

The training reviewed in-person and digital strategies to get people involved outside of the formal meeting chamber. One unique strategy employed by the City of Saginaw, Texas, is to meet people in their neighborhoods through a “Garage Gab” meeting where City officials will informally meet with neighborhood residents at a time and place the residents set.

Facilitators should also consider using both “thick” and “thin” engagement techniques.

“Thick” engagement is facilitated, structured discussion that usually involves small groups of individuals.

In contrast, “thin” engagement is more convenient and informal and involves the use of digital tools. Examples of digital tools and strategies for “thin” engagement include:

General purpose	Some representative examples
Crowdsourcing and ideation	AllOurIdeas; MindMixer; IdeaScale
Gathering feedback on problems and services	SeeClickFix; FixMyStreet; PublicStuff
Crowdfunding	Kickstarter; ioby
Petitions	Change.org
Games	@stake; Community PlanIt; Civic IDEA
Mapping and wikis	LocalWiki; OpenStreetMap
Illustrating options and voting on them	Metroquest; Ethelo
Hyperlocal community-building	Nextdoor; Front Porch Forum
Finding common ground in large groups	Pol.is
Polling	Mentimeter

Conclusion

While some aspects of the series may not be applicable to the Council, the training was informative and clearly conveyed the aspects that need to be considered when planning for and conducting public meetings.

We appreciated the opportunity to attend this training series. If you have questions, please contact Megan at ext. 7145 or James at ext. 7761.

A woman with short dark hair, wearing a yellow sweater, is speaking into a microphone. She is looking slightly to her left. In the background, a diverse group of people are standing and listening. The image has a blue and red gradient overlay at the top and bottom.

NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES OF PUBLIC MEETINGS

Better Public Meetings Series



Our Learning Journey

Today, we'll identify what helps and hinders effective public meetings and tackle the question: *"What does it take for people to feel (and be) heard?"*

Agenda:

Topic	Description
Welcome	Preview the learning journey, get to know the National Civic League, and take a quick poll to kick things off.
Understanding the Problem	Discuss the challenges of official public meetings and share your own experiences.
A Desire for Change	Identify the impacts of bad public meetings, discuss the need for change and the challenges involved, and explore real-world examples of how other cities have made improvements.
Solutions	Discover what it takes for people to feel (and be) heard and explore solutions for improving public meetings.
Take Action	Review a list of practical steps you can take to start improving your official public meetings.



About the National Civic League, Quick Poll

Model City Charter: <https://www.nationalcivicleague.org/resources/model-city-charter-9th-edition/>

Notes:



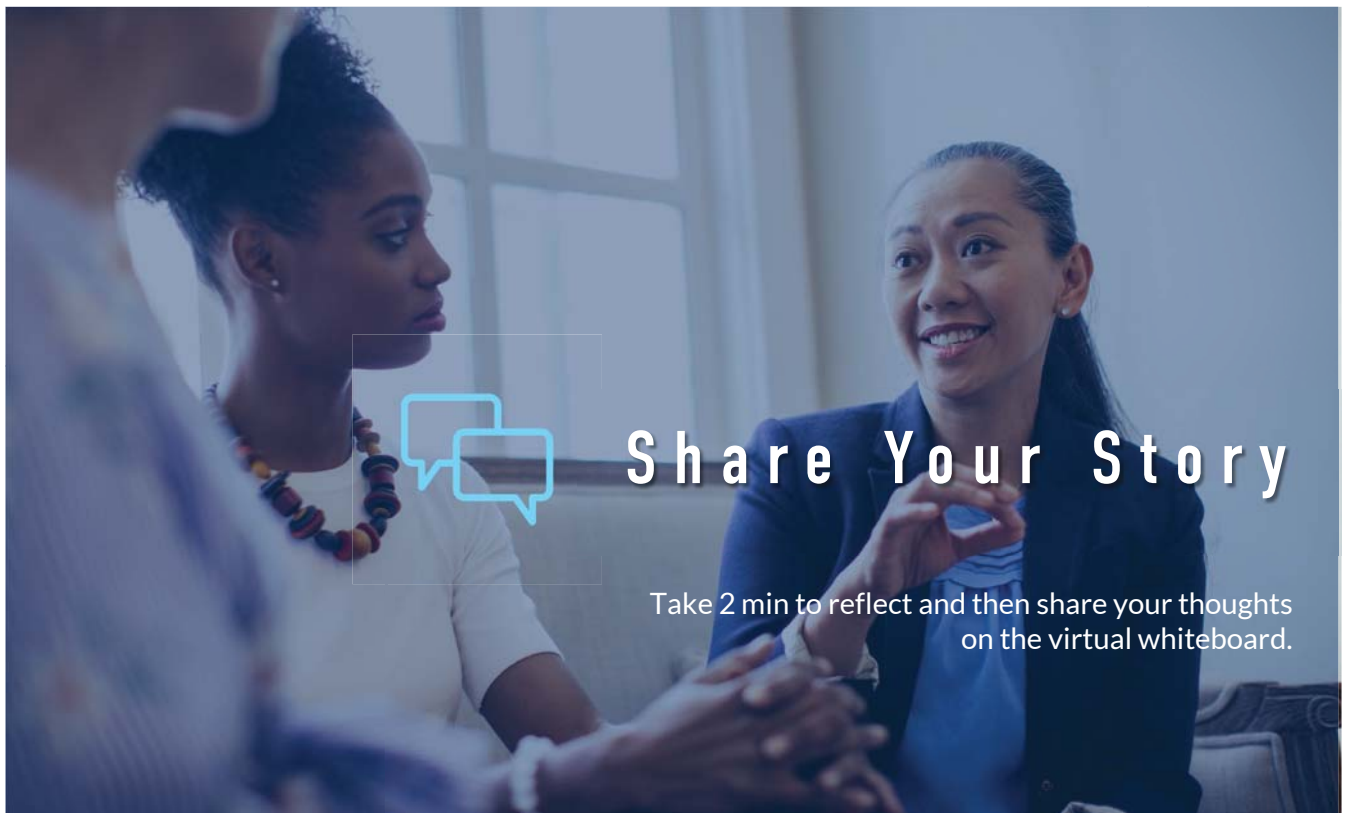
Notes:



What Are People Saying About Public Meetings?

- “There’s a difference between being heard and being listened to...not just conceding to the most prominent voices in the room.”
- “When you are a community member, you’re sort of talking to straight faces who aren’t responsive. When you’re elected, you’re hearing from people at the wrong moment in a project.”
- “Meetings can be intimidating and uncomfortable if you don’t know the right way (or the expected way) to communicate.”

Notes:

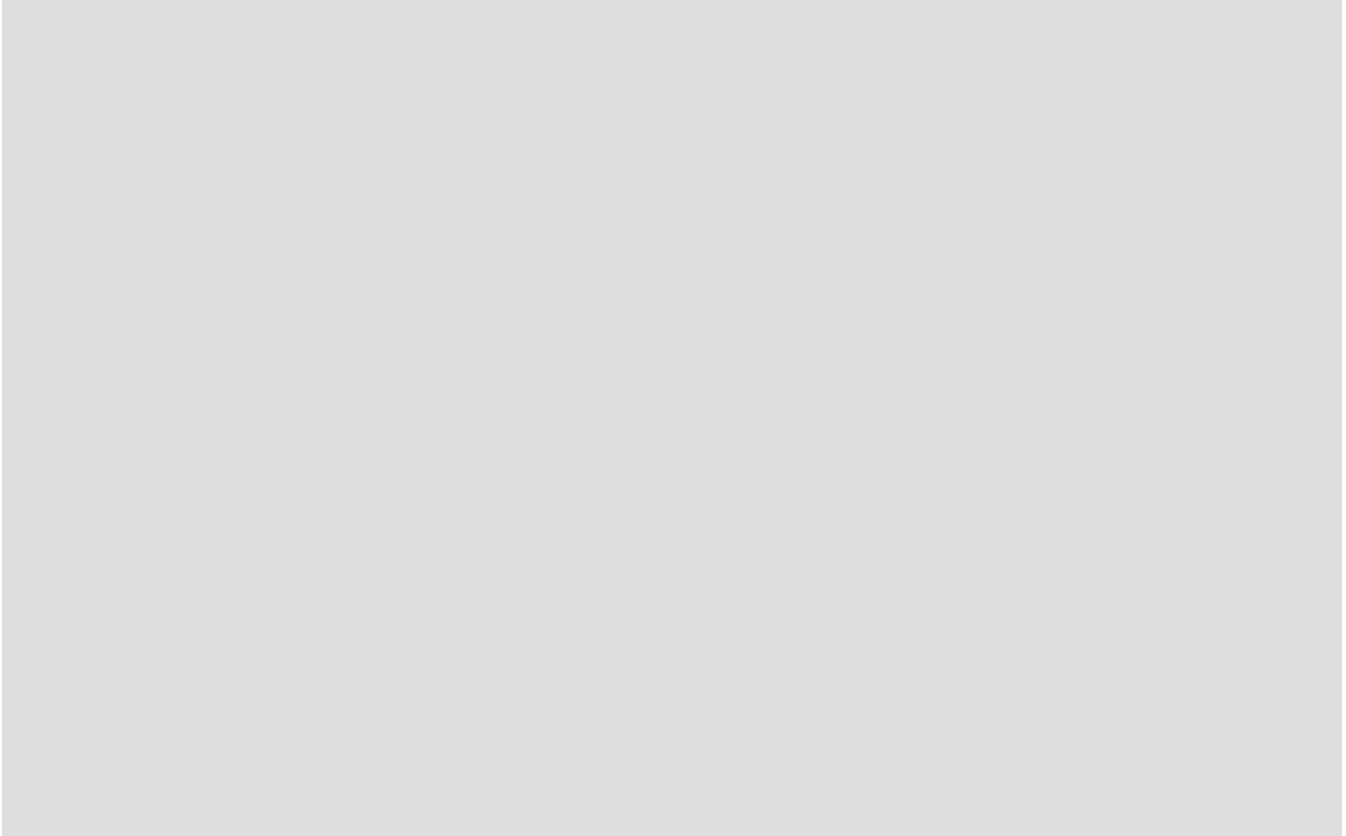


Reflect on the challenges and problems you have experienced in public meetings. What felt particularly hard? What lessons did you learn?

A large, empty rectangular area for reflection and sharing thoughts.



Notes:





Bad Public Meetings

- Lower public trust and confidence in government
- Increase frustration and stress for public officials and staff
- Worsen inequities because meeting participants are not representative of the communities most affected by policies

Notes:



- There are proven tools and practices that can ensure civil, productive dialogue
- These practices can be adopted as part of official public meetings
- Public satisfaction with public meetings, and the state of local democracy generally, can be measured through digital tools

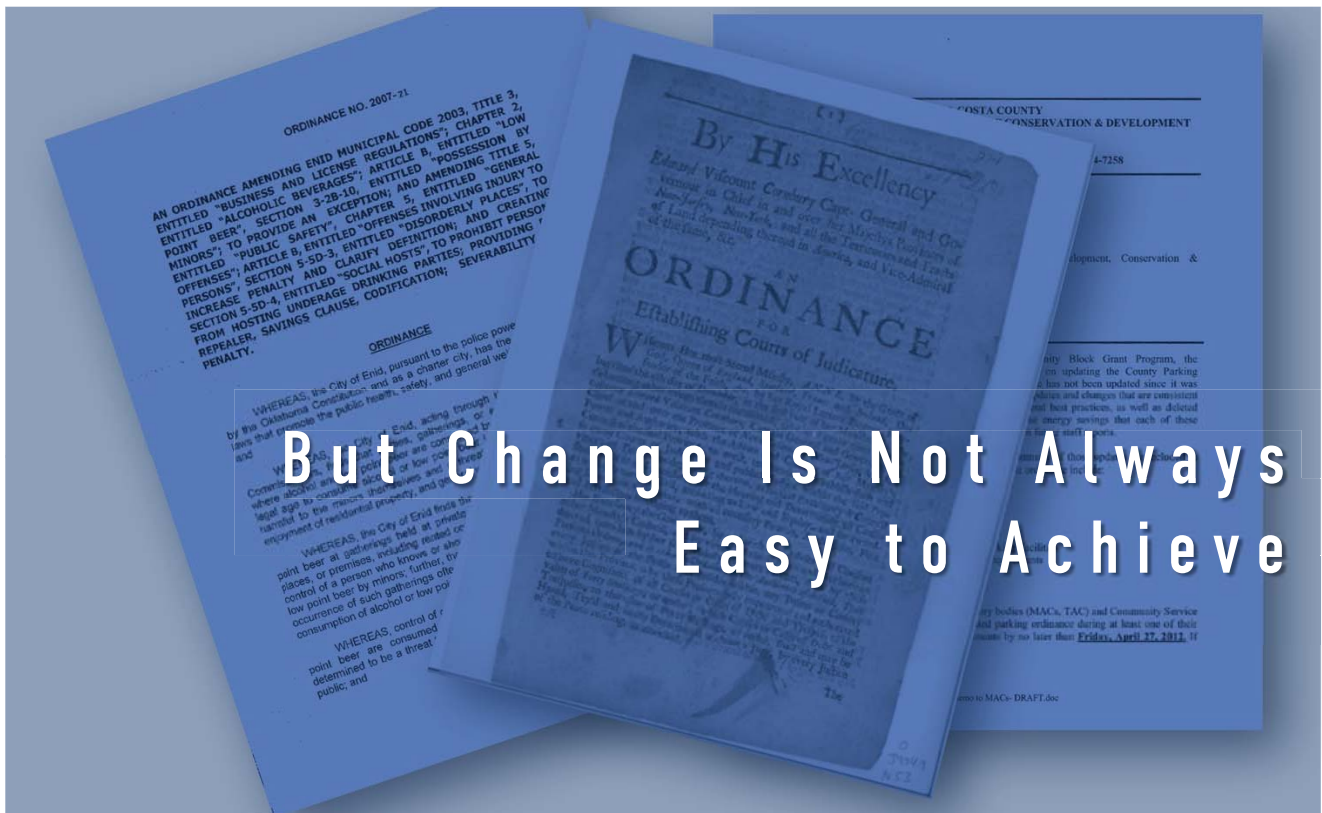
Notes:



Inside and Outside Government, a Desire for Change

- Elected officials AND staff AND community members want better ways to engage
- Confusion about when, not just where, issues are being discussed
- Security has become a big concern – and cost
- A common refrain: Life is too short and who wants this aggravation?

Notes:



But Change Is Not Always Easy to Achieve

Even though many people see the need, there are many concerns:

- What do the laws allow?
- Do we have the capacity?
- Will there be backlash?
- Many factors in whether communities can undertake the shift: elections, transitions, staff turnover, budgets, crises, politics, communications, etc.
- People can't imagine anything better

Notes:

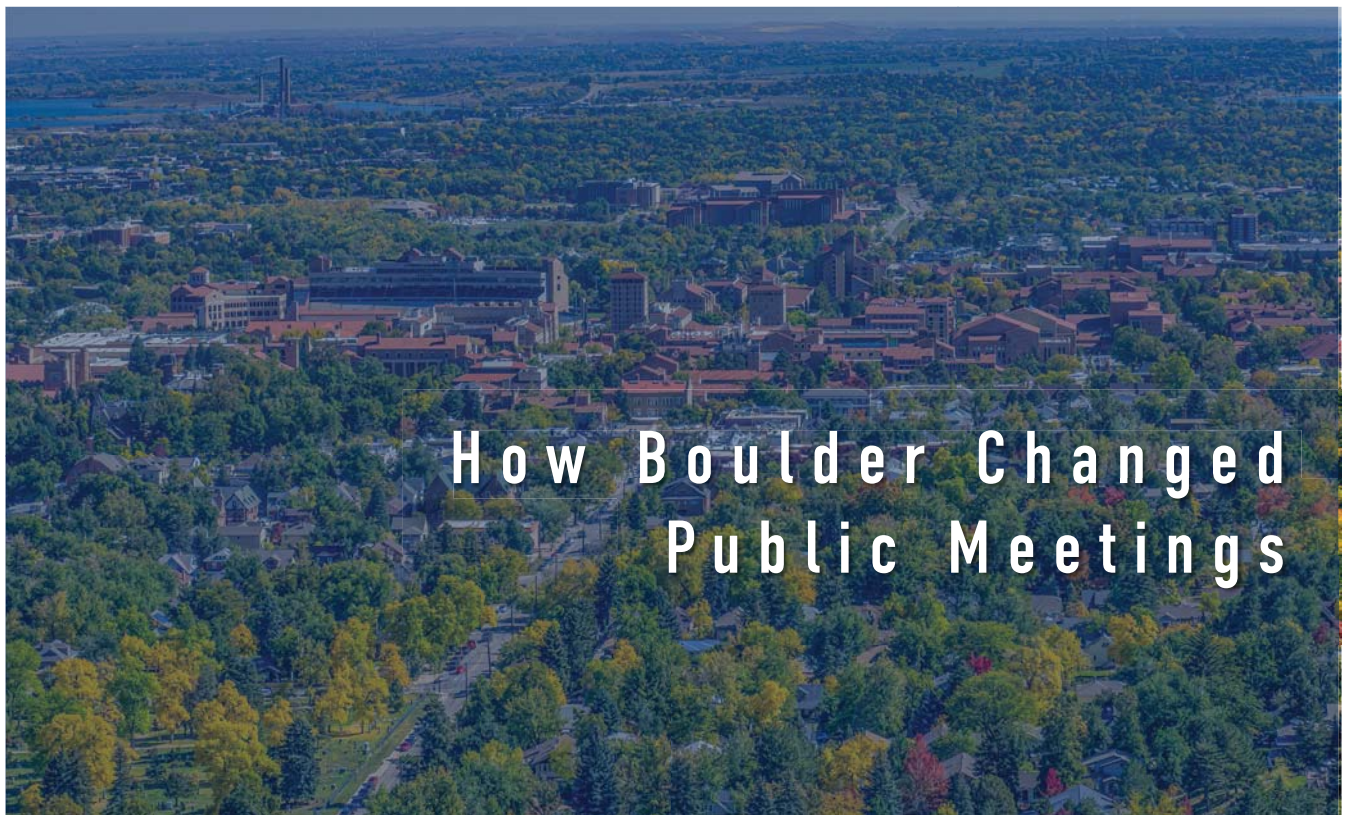


What Do the Laws Require?

A Generalization – States Differ!

- Two or fewer elected officials in any discussion
- Action can't be taken unless topic has appeared on agenda distributed beforehand
- Notes from discussions must be available to the public
- Some items in some states still require “3-minute” public comment

Notes:



- Started with study session
- Fishbowl format
- Some participants selected through civic lottery
- Small-group breakouts
- Plan released to community, showing connections to meeting

Notes:



How Mesa Changed Public Meetings

- Youth speakers at school board meetings
- Hacktivate process for young people, ideas addressed by school board
- “Question of the Month” hybrid process to gather input from meetings across district
- Deliberative process for selecting next superintendent

Notes:



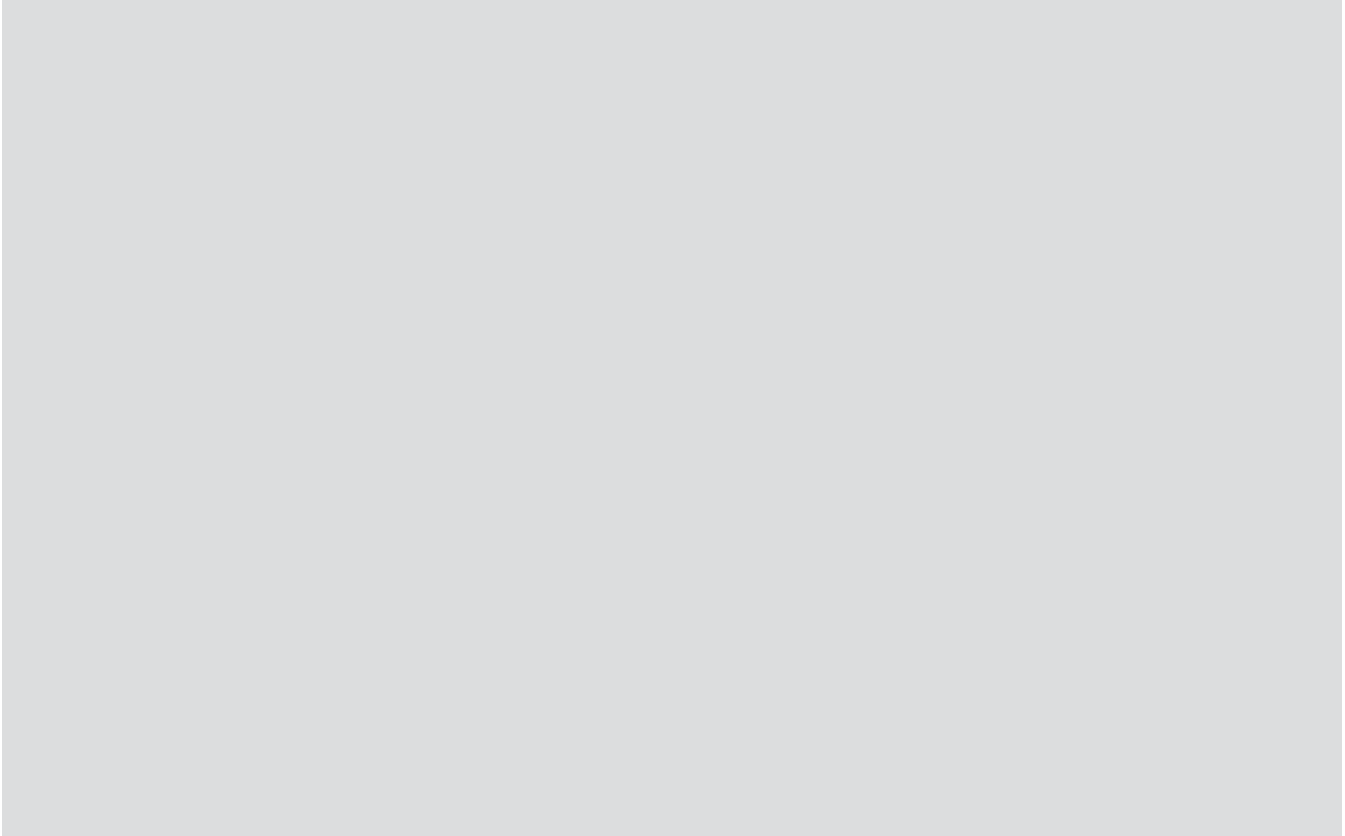
Notes:



Small-Group Discussion

"What does it take for people to feel (and be) heard?"
Take 10 min to discuss this question in your small group.

What does it take for people to feel (and be) heard?





What Does It Take for People to Feel/Be Heard?

- When they are face-to-face in a small-group setting
- When they can see the input displayed somehow
- When they encounter different views and info
- When there is some sort of response from officials/institutions
- For more, see: <https://www.nationalcivicleague.org/what-do-people-need-to-feel-heard/>

Notes:

Take Action

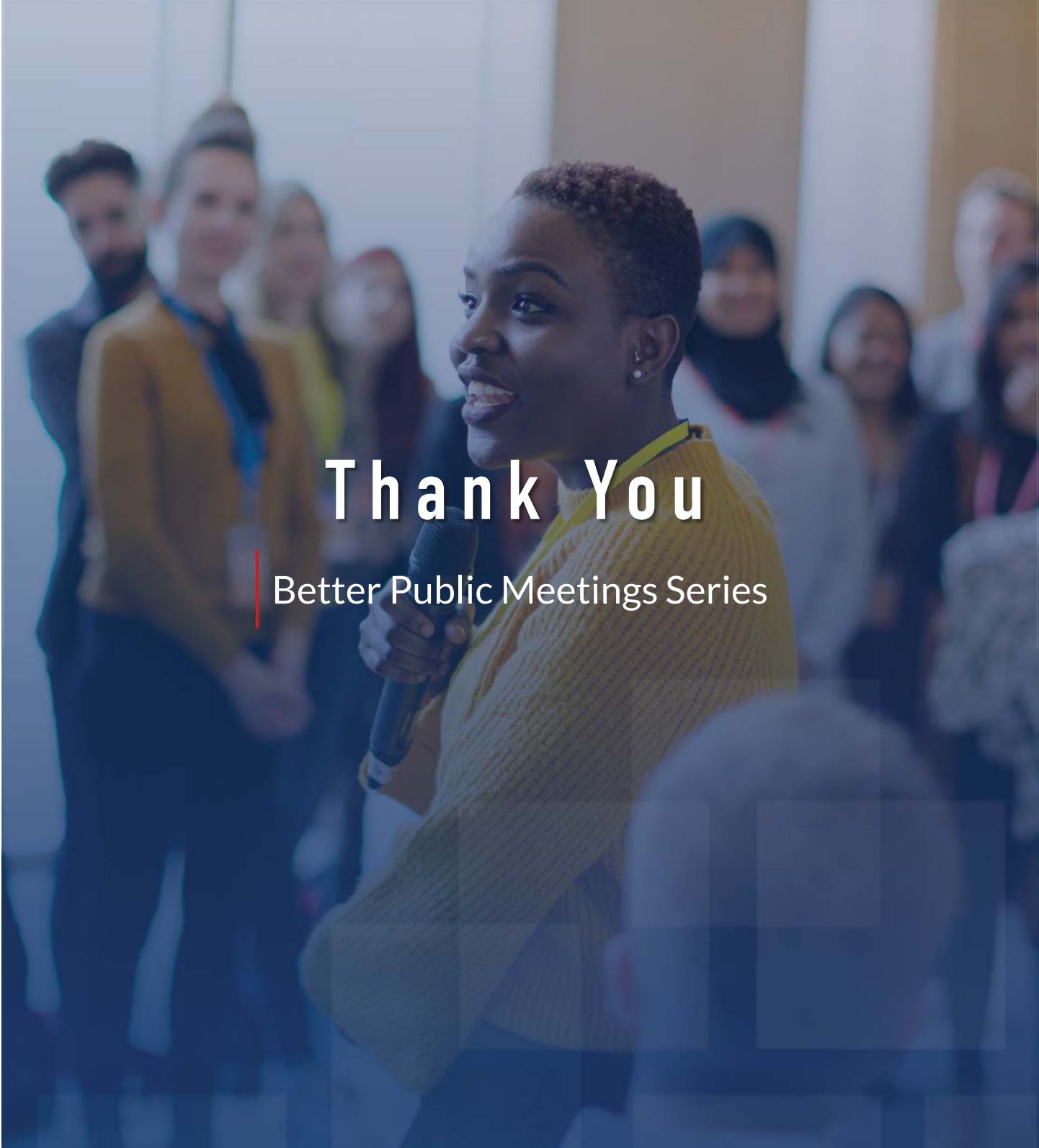
- 01 Take a look at the following article:

“What do people need to feel heard?”

<https://www.nationalcivicleague.org/what-do-people-need-to-feel-heard/>

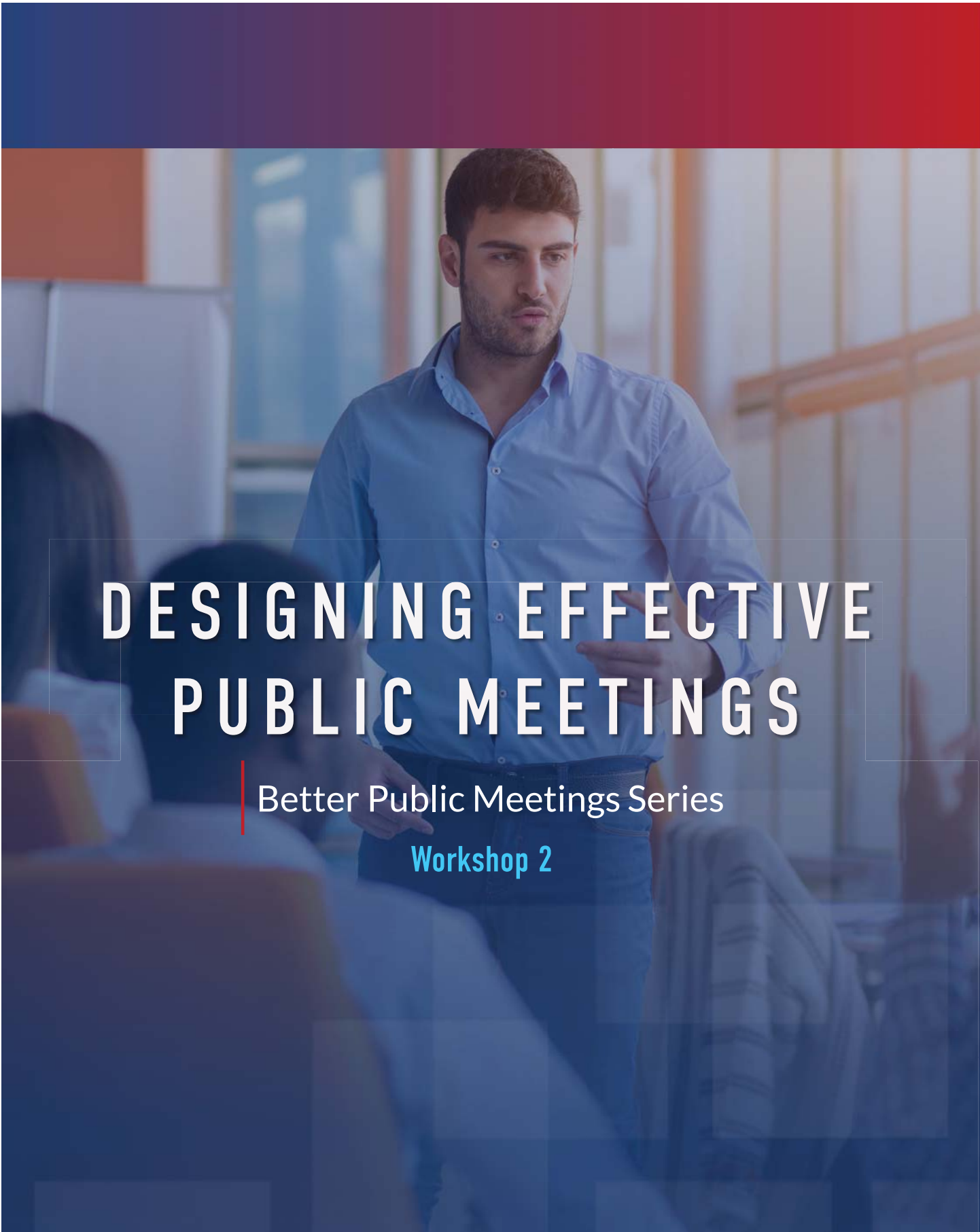
- 02 Think of 2-3 examples where you interacted with constituents and they seemed to feel and be heard. What distinguished those interactions?

- 03 Look up what your state open meetings law requires.

A woman with short dark hair, wearing a yellow sweater, is speaking into a microphone. She is looking slightly to her left. In the background, a diverse group of people are standing and listening. The image has a blue and red gradient overlay at the top and bottom.

Thank You

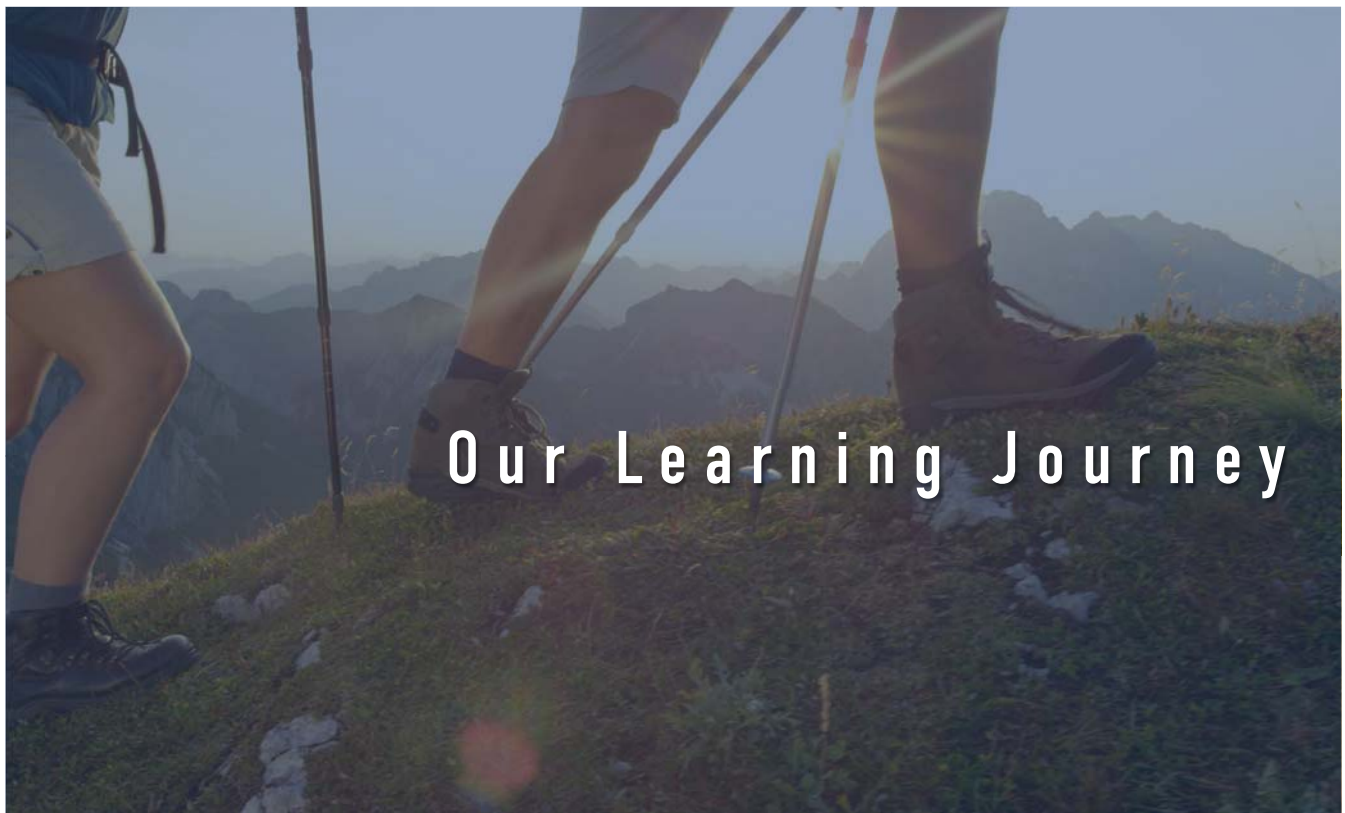
Better Public Meetings Series



DESIGNING EFFECTIVE PUBLIC MEETINGS

Better Public Meetings Series

Workshop 2



Today, we'll explore options for designing public meetings that are participatory, equitable, inclusive, and compliant with open meeting laws.

Agenda:

Topic	Description
Welcome	Preview the learning journey and discuss key takeaways from Workshop 1.
Designing Better Public Meetings	Identify the core elements of a well-designed public meeting and explore how applying them can help address common challenges you face.
Measuring Meeting Effectiveness	Discuss and explore ways to measure the effectiveness of public meetings.
Take Action	Review a list of practical steps you can take to start improving your official public meetings.



Notes:

Belonging in the Room

When you walk into a room,
what makes you feel like you
should be there?

*Take a moment to think, then type
your response in the chat.*



Notes:

A large, empty light gray rectangular area intended for taking notes.

Key Questions

- Are public meetings welcoming spaces?
- Do people feel that the topics being discussed are relevant to them?
- Do people have input into the agendas?
- How do people receive information before, during, and after meetings, and is it accessible enough?
- Are we conducting meetings in the most effective format and style?

Notes:

To Improve Public Meetings, Think Through:

- Design of processes
- Laws (charter, ordinance, state)
- Preparing council members and citizens
- Participation (what makes people feel/be heard?)
- Outreach to communities

Notes:

3 CORE NEEDS OF MEETINGS

1

NEED 1: GET OFFICIALS WHAT THEY NEED

Are they getting enough clear, decision-ready input?

2

NEED 2: SHOWCASE THE WORK OF STAFF

Are they showing how engagement shaped their work?

3

NEED 3: GATHER PUBLIC INPUT

Do they see multiple entry points (before/during/after), digital/in-person

KEEP THESE
OVERARCHING NEEDS
IN MIND WHEN
DESIGNING PUBLIC
MEETINGS



Notes:

Design of Processes: Agendas

- For each topic, decide what you are trying to achieve (e.g., initial exploration, initial public input, weighing of options, council decision).
- For each topic, use a process that suits the goal.
- Establish a process for suggesting items for future agendas, both during meetings and in other settings.



Notes:

Common Agenda Contents

1. **Meeting Details:** date, time, location (sometimes hybrid or virtual options)
2. **Call to Order / Roll Call**
3. **Pledge / Invocation** (optional, depending on the city)
4. **Approval of Minutes** from previous meetings
5. **Public Hearings** (if required)
6. **Consent Agenda** (routine items grouped together)
7. **Regular or New Business** – discussion and votes on non-routine matters
8. **Presentations / Special Business** (awards, proclamations, etc.)
9. **Reports:** from staff, committees, occasionally the city manager or mayor
10. **Public Comments / Citizen Input** (on agenda items, or sometimes more broadly)
11. **Adjournment**



Notes:

Standard Process in an Agenda

Take a moment to review.
What issues might this
process create?

Before the Meeting	Council: Gets a 300-page packet a few days before, with legal/technical detail but little synthesis. Staff: Writes long reports; limited public engagement summary (if any). Public: Notices posted legally (72 hrs prior), little awareness unless directly impacted.
During the Meeting	Council: Hears staff's technical presentation; listens to open public comment (sometimes unfocused). Staff: Presents raw data and legal requirements, may not explain how citizens were engaged earlier. Public: Speaks in 2–3 min slots; many express frustration about being unaware until now.
After the Meeting	Council: Votes; rationale rarely tied back to citizen comments. Staff: Drafts ordinance or implementation plan; engagement is not often visible going forward. Public: No clear sense of whether their comments mattered.

Notes:

Modified Adjustments to an Agenda

What's different about this approach?

Before the Meeting	Council: Receives 1-page “Decision Brief” with issue, options, fiscal impact, and summary of prior citizen engagement. Staff: Required to include a “Community Engagement Summary” (where they asked for input, what they heard, how it shaped their recommendation). Public: Agenda highlights published in plain language online; citizens can submit digital comments ahead of time.
During the Meeting	Council: Sees agenda framed as “Decision Needed: Approve, Amend, or Deny Rezoning.” Staff: Presents clearly: <i>Issue → Options → What We Heard from Public → Staff Recommendation</i> . Public: Invited to comment at this agenda item, with prompts (e.g., “How should traffic impacts be weighed?”). Time structured: staff (5 min), public (10 min), council (10 min).
After the Meeting	Council: Votes, citing staff report <i>and</i> public concerns summarized. Staff: Assigned follow-up action noted in agenda record (e.g., “Prepare amended draft considering traffic concerns”). Public: Receives short recap on website/newsletter: “We heard 42 comments; key issues were X and Y; Council amended ordinance accordingly.”

Notes:

Hypothetical Alternative Agenda

How might this approach improve the meeting experience?

Before the Meeting	Council: Gets a “Decision Matrix” including options, tradeoffs, staff recs, and annotated citizen perspectives. Staff: Maintains a public-facing dashboard showing process timeline, FAQs, and engagement results to date. Public: Engages asynchronously for weeks (surveys, forums, pop-ups); arrives informed of tradeoffs already considered.
During the Meeting	Council: Deliberates with structured citizen perspectives integrated (e.g., grouped themes displayed live). Staff: Co-presents with “Community Voices” slide showing top themes. Public: Can comment in person or digitally (comments appear in real time). Citizens respond not in a vacuum, but with shared context.
After the Meeting	Council: Votes with explicit reference: “ <i>We chose Option B because of citizen concerns about traffic.</i> ” Staff: Publishes “Decision Digest” showing chain of influence (what staff recommended, what citizens raised, what Council decided). Public: Gets feedback loop: “ <i>You said... We did...</i> ” explaining how input shaped outcomes.

Notes:

Meeting Core Needs of Meetings

- **Council** gets progressively *clearer, decision-ready input* and accountability throughlines.
- **Staff** shifts from data-dumping to *framing public engagement as part of their expertise*.
- **Public** moves from reactive, uninformed participation → to informed, structured, and acknowledged input.
- **Before/During/After** framing makes it clear that accountability is not a single moment but a cycle.

Notes:

Where Public Comment Fits in Agendas

Before the Meeting Begins

- **General Public Comment (Open Forum):**
Held right after roll call, pledge, and approval of minutes.
Citizens can raise issues not on the agenda.

During the Meeting

- **Item-Specific Comment:**
 - The public is invited to comment when that agenda item comes up, usually right after the staff presentation and before the council discussion or vote.
 - Common for public hearings (e.g., zoning changes, ordinances, permits) where due process is required.
- **Comment on Non-Consent Items:**
 - The consent agenda is passed quickly; then the council moves to "regular business," where comments are allowed on each topic.
- **Open Comment Period / Citizen Concerns:**
 - At the close of business, people are allowed to raise issues not on the agenda.

(III) PUBLIC HEARING: COMPREHENSIVE PLAN	
PH1. <u>Envision Evanston 2045 Draft Comprehensive Plan</u>	3 - 26
The Community Development Department recommends that the City Council review and vote on proposed changes suggested by Councilmembers based on their review of the Draft Comprehensive Plan, as recommended by the Land Use Commission.	
<u>For Discussion</u>	
<u>Envision Evanston 2045 Draft Comprehensive Plan</u>	
(IV) PUBLIC COMMENT	
Members of the public are welcome to speak at City Council meetings. As part of the Council agenda, a period for public comments shall be offered at the commencement of each regular Council meeting. Public comments will be noted in the City Council Minutes and become part of the official record. Those wishing to speak should sign their name and the agenda item or non-agenda topic to be addressed on a designated participation sheet. If there are five or fewer speakers, fifteen minutes shall be provided for Public Comment. If there are more than five speakers, a period of forty-five minutes shall be provided for all comment, and no individual shall speak longer than three minutes. The Mayor will allocate time among the speakers to ensure that Public Comment does not exceed forty-five minutes. The business of the City Council shall commence forty-five minutes after the beginning of Public Comment. Aldermen do not respond during Public Comment. Public Comment is intended to foster dialogue in a respectful and civil manner. Public comments are requested to be made with these guidelines in mind.	
(V) ADJOURNMENT	

Notes:

Public Comment 101

Format	When It Happens	What It Covers
General / Open Forum (Before Meeting)	Early in the agenda (after roll call/pledge)	Any topic, even if not on the agenda
Item-Specific Comment (During Agenda Item)	After staff presentation, before council deliberation	Input on a single agenda item (e.g., rezoning, ordinance)
Public Hearings	Scheduled and advertised in advance	Required by law (zoning, budget, ordinances)
Consent Agenda (Comment Limited)	Rarely during consent items; usually skipped	Routine or non-controversial items
Closing Comment Period (End of Meeting)	Last item before adjournment	Any issue not covered earlier

Notes:

Public Comment 101 Cont'd

Format	Pros	Cons
General / Open Forum (Before Meeting)	Citizens can raise new issues, sets tone of public voice	Often unfocused, council can't act immediately on non-agenda items
Item-Specific Comment (During Agenda Item)	Input directly tied to decision-making, legally required for hearings	Can get repetitive, dominated by opponents/proponents
Public Hearings	Formal, ensures due process and record of input	Can feel rigid, less flexible for broader issues
Consent Agenda (Comment Limited)	Speeds up business	Citizens may feel excluded if something "routine" is actually meaningful
Closing Comment Period (End of Meeting)	Citizens can reflect on meeting, raise final concerns	Attendance often thins, council less engaged late in meeting

Notes:

How to Adapt Public Comments For Specific Needs

- Need 1: Efficiency
- Need 2: Avoiding Polarization
- Need 3: Access
- Need 4: Accountability

Notes:

Public Comments for Efficiency

- If the number is excessive, randomly select public comments.
- Prioritize speakers from different parts of a city not just repeat voices.
- Ensure Pro and Con stances are given equal time at the mic.



Notes:

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Public Comments to Limit Conflict

- Public comments are structured around questions ('what impacts should we consider') rather than a position or stance on an issue.
- Staff highlights a range of views to show that issues may seem polarizing due to a few loud voices, but those few people don't define the whole record, and how the public feels.
- Council deliberation specifically references diversity of perspectives.

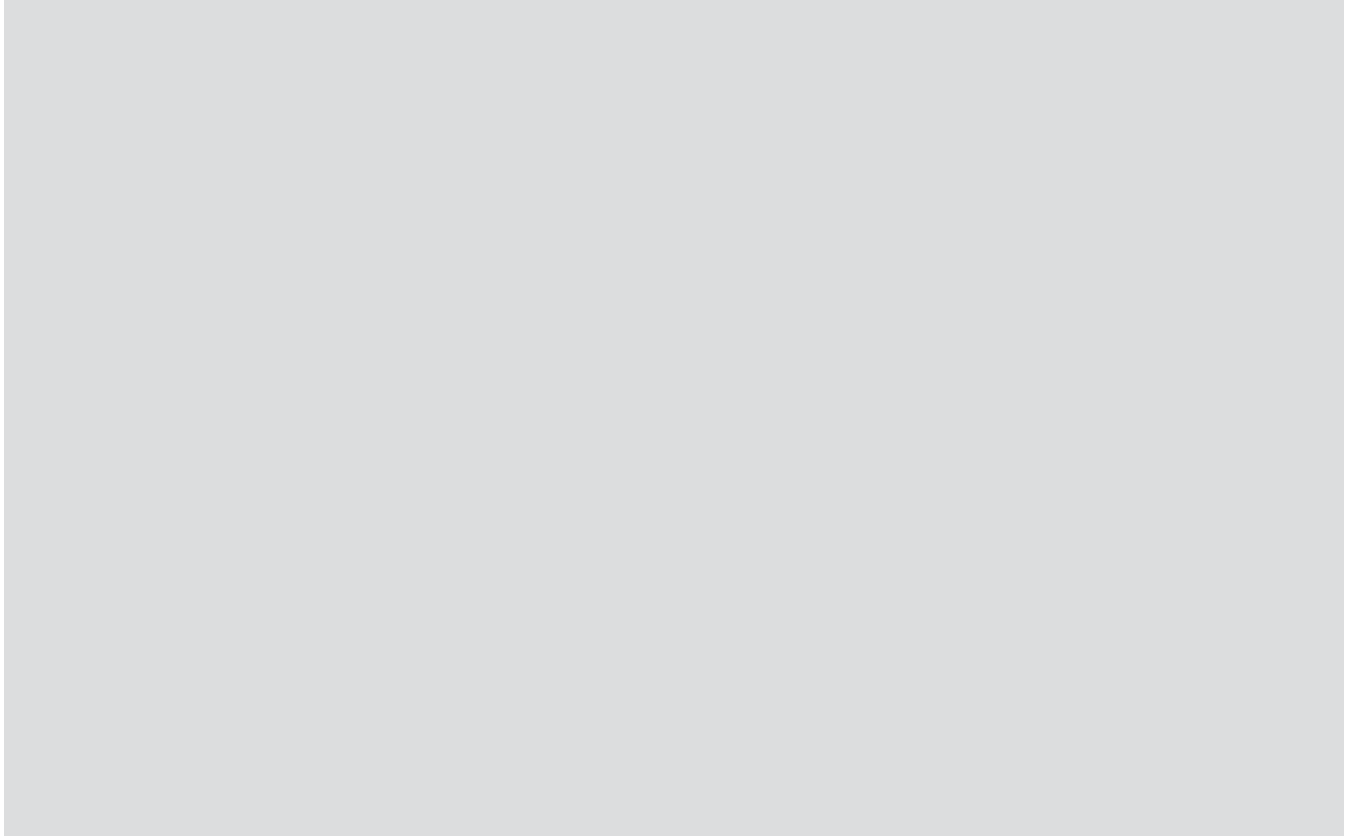
Notes:

Public Comments for Access

- Allow for asynchronous submissions – audio, video, written in advance that can be summarized.
- Enable digital input during meetings – perhaps those watching can be polled or comment in real time.
- Organize small group dialogues PRE-meeting (We'll return to this idea in a later set).



Notes:



Public Comments for Accountability

- Council acknowledgement protocol – figure a way around being ‘silent’
- Staff highlights input themes – summarize the various channels of input

Notes:

Lakewood Speaks

• Open for comment - Agenda item 1 of 1

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

September 17, 2025 LAC - Civic Awareness Committee Meeting Item #1

[Comment on this item](#)

 Stay informed

Get notified of any updates about this item.

Email address

[Subscribe](#)

Public Comments

Leave a public comment for the public record and LAC - Civic Awareness Committee to review.
Commenting period open until 3:00 PM MDT 9/17/25

[Comment on this item](#)

[Comment by phone](#)

No comments have been received.

[Ask City Staff](#)

 Lakewood Speaks



Lakewood
Colorado

Participate in Lakewood government online

Know what's being discussed and offer your perspective via Lakewood Speaks, Lakewood's limited public forum for voicing opinions on issues of community impact.

[Learn more](#)

lakewoodspeaks.org

ICMA



Notes:

ICMA



Meeting Needs of Public Comments

- **Traditional model**
 - Mic = everything
 - Whoever shows up speaks longest and most forcefully dominates
 - Conflict is amplified
 - Council hears positions not perspectives
- **Balanced or Alternatives**
 - Mic = one among several channels of participation
 - The mic doesn't define the debate
- **WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?**
 - Council hears balanced picture, staff shows its professional value in framing the debate, and the public isn't involved in a contest of volume.

Notes:



ACTIVITY

In your small group, brainstorm strategies to address a specific public comment need.

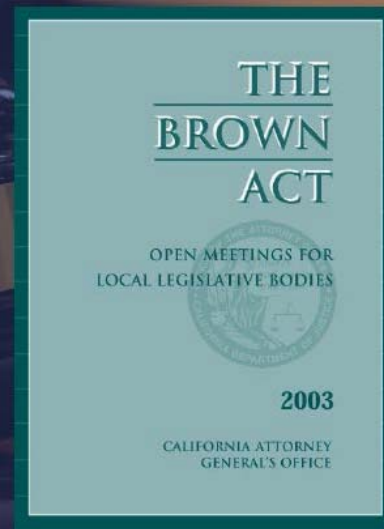
- Need 1: Efficiency
- Need 2: Avoiding Polarization
- Need 3: Access
- Need 4: Accountability

Notes:

Rigid Sunshine Laws

Under California's **Brown Act** (Gov. Code § 54954.3), a legislative body must provide an opportunity for public comment on each item on the agenda *before or during* the body's consideration of the item. Also, there must be time set aside for public comment on matters within the body's jurisdiction that are not on the agenda.

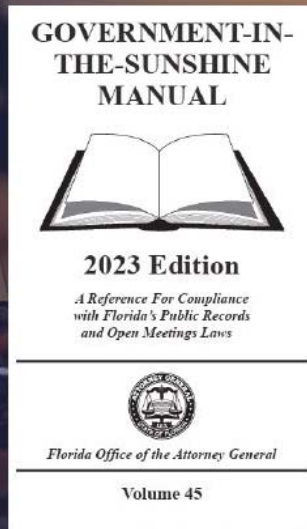
Reasonable time limits are allowed, but public criticism of the body, its members, or staff is explicitly permitted.



Notes:

Broad Sunshine Laws

Under Florida's *Government in the Sunshine Law* (part of Ch. 286, Florida Statutes), public boards or commissions must give the public a "reasonable opportunity to be heard" on propositions before the board acts.



Notes:

What LEGALLY 'Counts' as a 'Reasonable Opportunity to be Heard'?

Sunshine laws DO NOT always or often prescribe the format.

What is allowed, generally speaking:

- Citizens are genuinely allowed to express their views.
- Comments or participation happen before voting.
- An opportunity to directly address or talk with the board/council.

Notes:

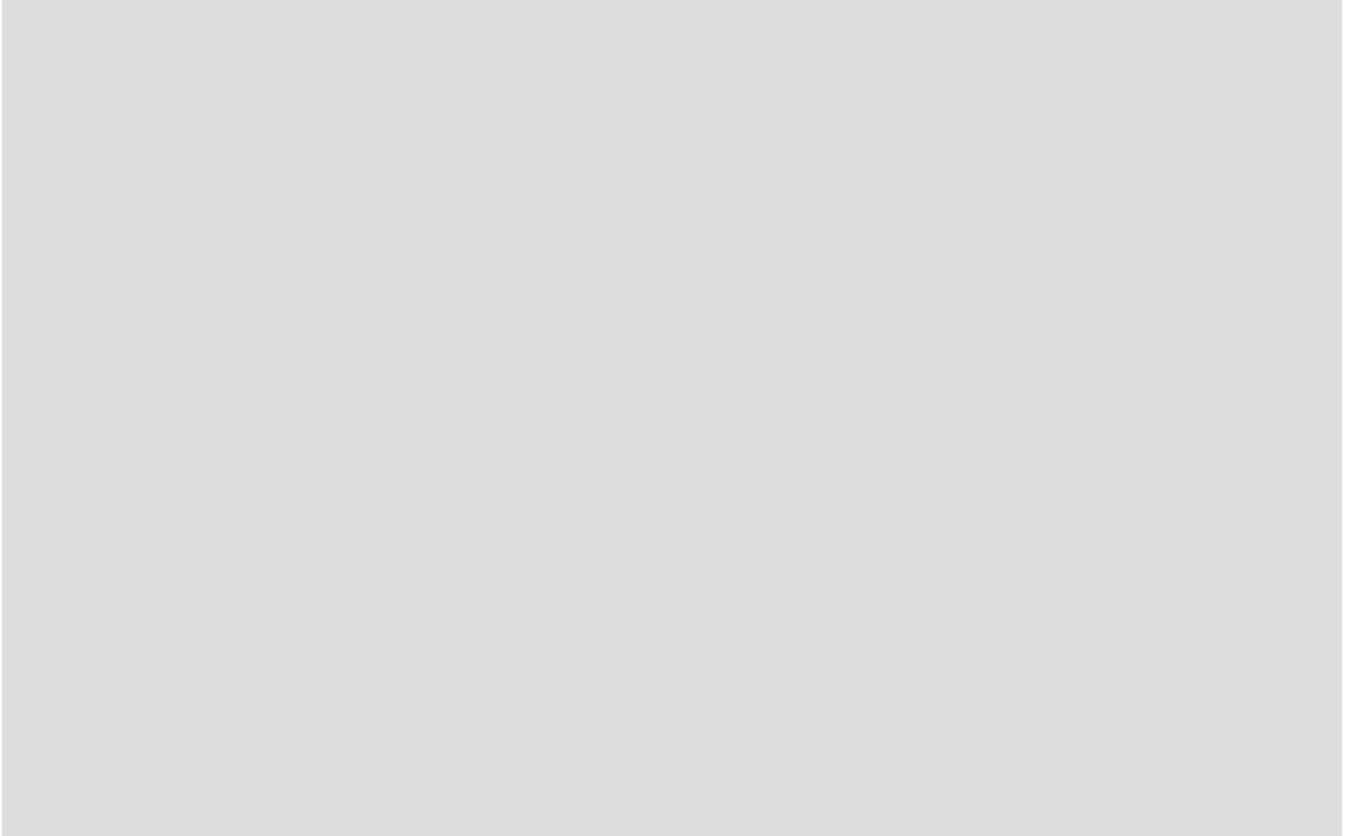
Preparing Council Members and Citizens

For Council Members	For Residents
Decision briefs	Plain language agendas
Conflict management training	Background explainers
Small group facilitator training	Multiple input channels
Visual aids	Structured prompts
Time management tools	Participation guides
Tracking systems	Feedback loops

Notes:



Notes:



Try the Civic Engagement DEMO



<https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/7570594/generic-city-council-scorecard>



Notes:

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Let People Rate Meetings – And Local Democracy Generally – Through a Tool Like a Scorecard

Sample results:

- Rate Your Overall Experience
 - 51% Great, 33.3% Okay, 15.7% Poor
- Attendance
 - 100% Not first time
- Participation
 - 51% In-Person
 - 49% Online
- The Meeting Would Be Better If:
 - 41.2% It Was Clear How Community Input Influences Decisions
- Community Engagement
 - 45.7% The Same People Do Everything
 - 59.1% Different Groups Don't Mix
 - 65.9% Aged 40+



We want to hear from you!

Please rate your experience at this evening's session

An easy online scorecard is available for all meetings from Sept. 7 through Dec. 7, 2023 for you to share your feedback. You may complete the form once for each meeting you attend (whether in-person or online) over the next three months.



Use the QR code above or this link to access the scorecard:
<http://bldr.fyi/better-meetings>

Making Boulder City Council Meetings Better

The City of Boulder is teaming with the Democracy Innovations for Better Public Meetings Project, in partnership with the National Civic League, to try ways that could make City Council meetings more engaging and satisfying for all.

Notes:

What Do You Want to Try?



- Consider how you could modify your meetings to incorporate the practices shared today.
- What will you add or change?

Please take a moment to think and add your responses in the chat.

Notes:

Take Action

- 01 Take a look at the following readings:

“Local Democracy in Boulder Gets a New Look”

<https://www.nationalcivicleague.org/case-studies/local-democracy-in-boulder-gets-a-new-look/>

“Ten Steps Toward a Better Democracy”

<https://thefulcrum.us/governance-legislation/how-to-improve-democracy>

- 02 Conduct a self-assessment of your current public meeting practices to identify areas for improvement.

- 03 Draft a mock agenda for a public meeting to practice incorporating one or more of the tools and practices shared today.

A man with short brown hair and a beard, wearing a light blue button-down shirt and dark jeans, stands in a meeting room. He is gesturing with his hands while speaking to a group of people whose backs are to the camera. The room has large windows in the background, letting in bright light. A red and blue gradient bar is at the top of the image.

Thank You

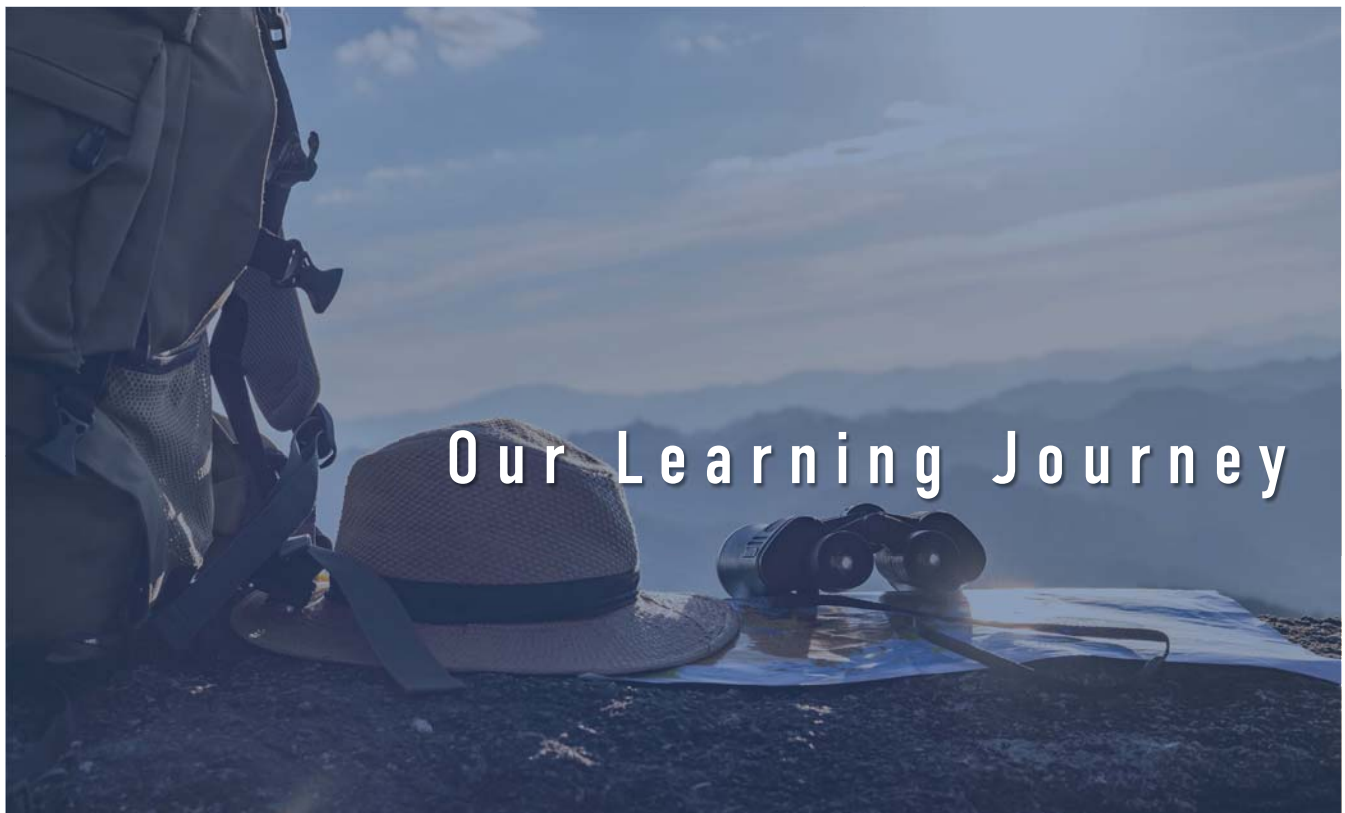
Better Public Meetings Series



Facilitating Civil, Effective Meetings

Better Public Meetings Series

Workshop 3



Today, we'll explore tools and practices for facilitating public meetings that are inclusive, civil, and effective.

Agenda:

Topic	Description
Welcome	Preview the learning journey and discuss key takeaways from Workshop 2.
Good Facilitation: What It Takes	Identify effective practices for facilitating engaging and productive public meetings.
Case Studies	Review two case studies detailing how Boulder, CO and Mesa, AZ introduced innovative improvements to their public meeting processes.
Facilitating Meetings Where People Live, Work, and Gather	Learn about diverse approaches to conducting official public meetings.
Facilitation Tools	Explore facilitation tools that help people feel (and be) heard.
Take Action	Review a list of practical steps you can take to start improving your official public meetings.

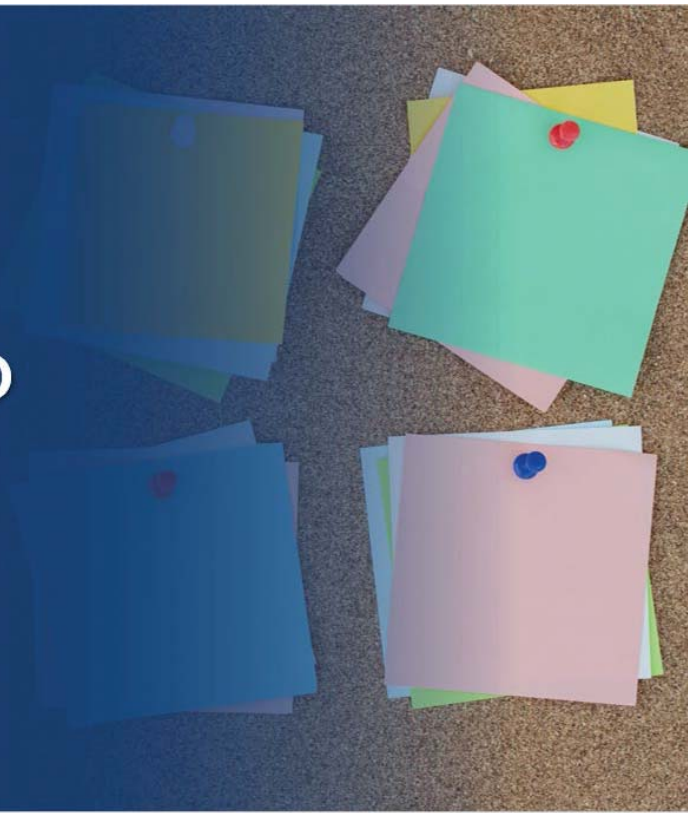


GOOD FACILITATION: WHAT IT TAKES



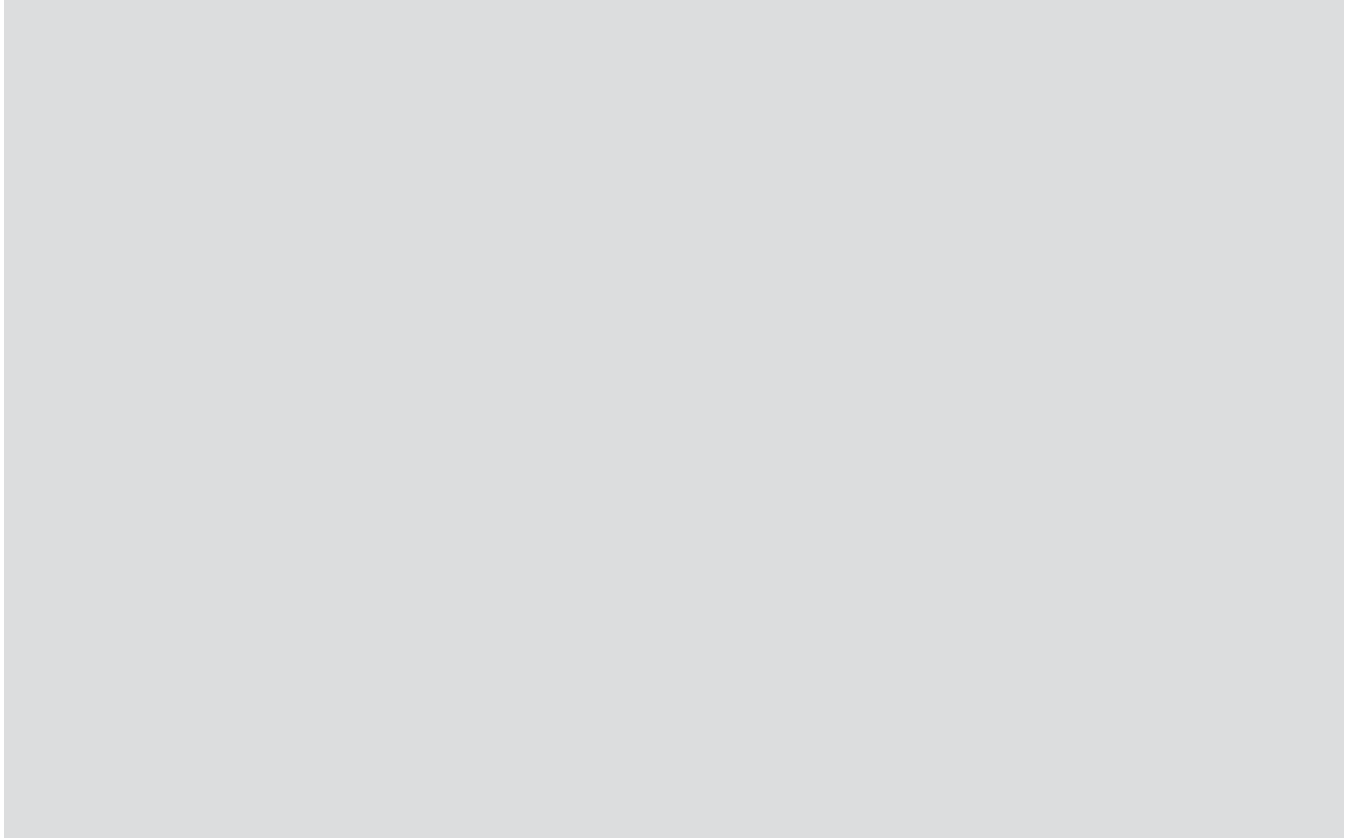
Notes:

PADLET BOARD ACTIVITY



Notes:

[Visit board](#)



What It Takes for Good Facilitation

- Room design
- Forms of active listening
- Learning
- Deliberating
- Making decisions
- Accessibility



Notes:

Select an Important Problem or Topic

- People gravitate to SOLVING problems
- Pick a vital issue
- Make their participation feel relevant
- Economic development, housing, transportation – things that impact people's lives



Notes:

Invite People

- Think about who you want in the room
- Go to them, use various means to get people involved
- Have trusted leaders encourage people
- Have street-level bureaucracy/staff collaborate with nonprofits and departments to gather new people



Notes:

Random Selection

- Can be used to select participants who show up or for general invite — do this to ensure that the people participating aren't just the usual group or stacked with a single perspective.

OR

- Sortition or civic lottery can be used more formally and done through a full invite to the community.



Notes:

Think About the Space

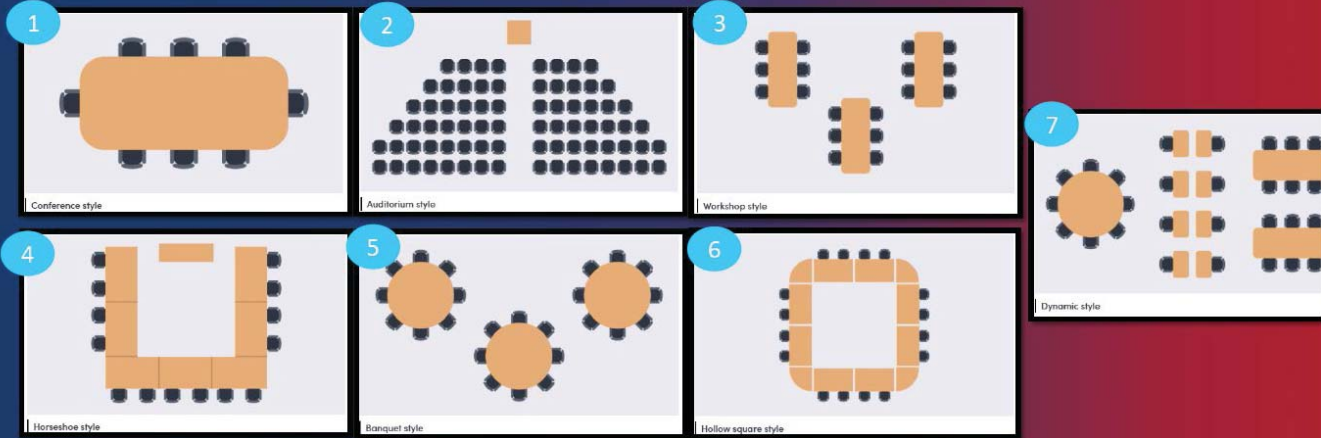
- Make the room less intimidating
- Think carefully about power dynamics
- Build a space that promotes collegiality



Notes:

A large, empty gray rectangular area intended for taking notes.

Which layout do you think would generate the most dialogue and why?



Images from Envoy.com | [Resource: https://envoy.com/space-management/meeting-room-layouts](https://envoy.com/space-management/meeting-room-layouts)

Notes:

Learning

- Do not let the conversation default to **PRE-FORMED** opinions
- Encourage opinions to be based on information presented in real time
- Build the conversation around nuanced information
- Have staff, and possibly one or two stakeholders with different perspectives, give a presentation
- Provide a holistic view of the issue



Notes:

Small-Group Deliberation

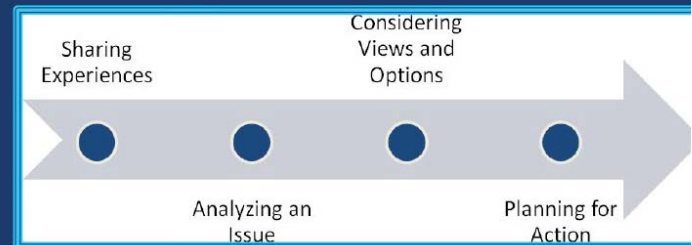
- Shift from ONE big plenary to several tables
- Groups of 4-8, randomly sorted, facilitators
- Group agrees to ground rules
- Pair elected officials with each group
- Process for summarizing/sharing ideas (do it digitally – like an online polling or texting-based platform)



Notes:

Issue Framing

- Provide the basic information
- Give people space to talk about why they care, and how their experiences matter
- Provide several views or options, presented as fairly as possible
- Present different possibilities for action (by government, by other groups/organizations, by individuals)
- This IS NOT a free for all – you structure questions and steer the conversation when it veers



Notes:

Accessibility

- Provide real-time, on-site translation
- Consider the linguistic needs of your community
- Consider childcare, transportation, and food needs to support diverse participation



Notes:

Pre-Meeting Dialogue

- Have adjacent groups meet among themselves
 - A commission, board, youth council, advisory group, a group of underrepresented leaders
- Create a throughline from meetings OUTSIDE official meetings that connect INSIDE official meetings
 - Invite people to present what they talked about

Notes:

Pre-Meeting Crowd Sourcing

- Provide the digital tools to crowd source input before a meeting
- Create a throughline where public input is presented at OFFICIAL meetings
- People give ideas and the themes are given recognition



Notes:

A large, empty gray rectangular area intended for taking notes.

Closing the Feedback Loop

- Closing the loop is essential for making people feel heard
- The challenge: reaching them after the meeting is hard
- Use strategies that embed a two-way exchange: survey panels, texting platforms, strong connections with grassroots groups and boards/commissions
- Begin every meeting with a summary of what happened since the last one



Notes:

TAKE 5

We've shared a lot!

Take **5 minutes** to discuss and react to what's been shared so far. You can reflect on any of the following topics in your small group:

- Selecting an important problem or topic
- Inviting people
- Random selection
- Thinking about the space
- Learning
- Small-group deliberation
- Issue framing
- Accessibility
- Pre-meeting dialogue
- Pre-meeting crowd sourcing
- Closing the Feedback Loop



Notes:

Boulder, CO Case Study



Notes:

Better Public Meetings project

Process and timeline

Democracy
Innovation



CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE SCAN

- Interview community organizations and government staff.
- Launch a scorecard to rate public meetings.



COLLABORATE

Share the findings with the community and hold a visioning exercise.



DISCUSS IDEAS

Work with civic engagement practitioners, city managers, staff and elected officials to discuss prospects for better public meetings.



INTEGRATE INNOVATIONS

Continue monitoring approaches and tools that uniquely address the community's needs.

Notes:

Civic Engagement Scorecard

A quantitative online tool for the public to rate their experiences at city council meetings. It offers various ways to visualize collated data.

- 37 complete responses
- 13 partial responses
- The public provided their input at 7 regular council meetings between Sept 12 and Dec 7

ICMA

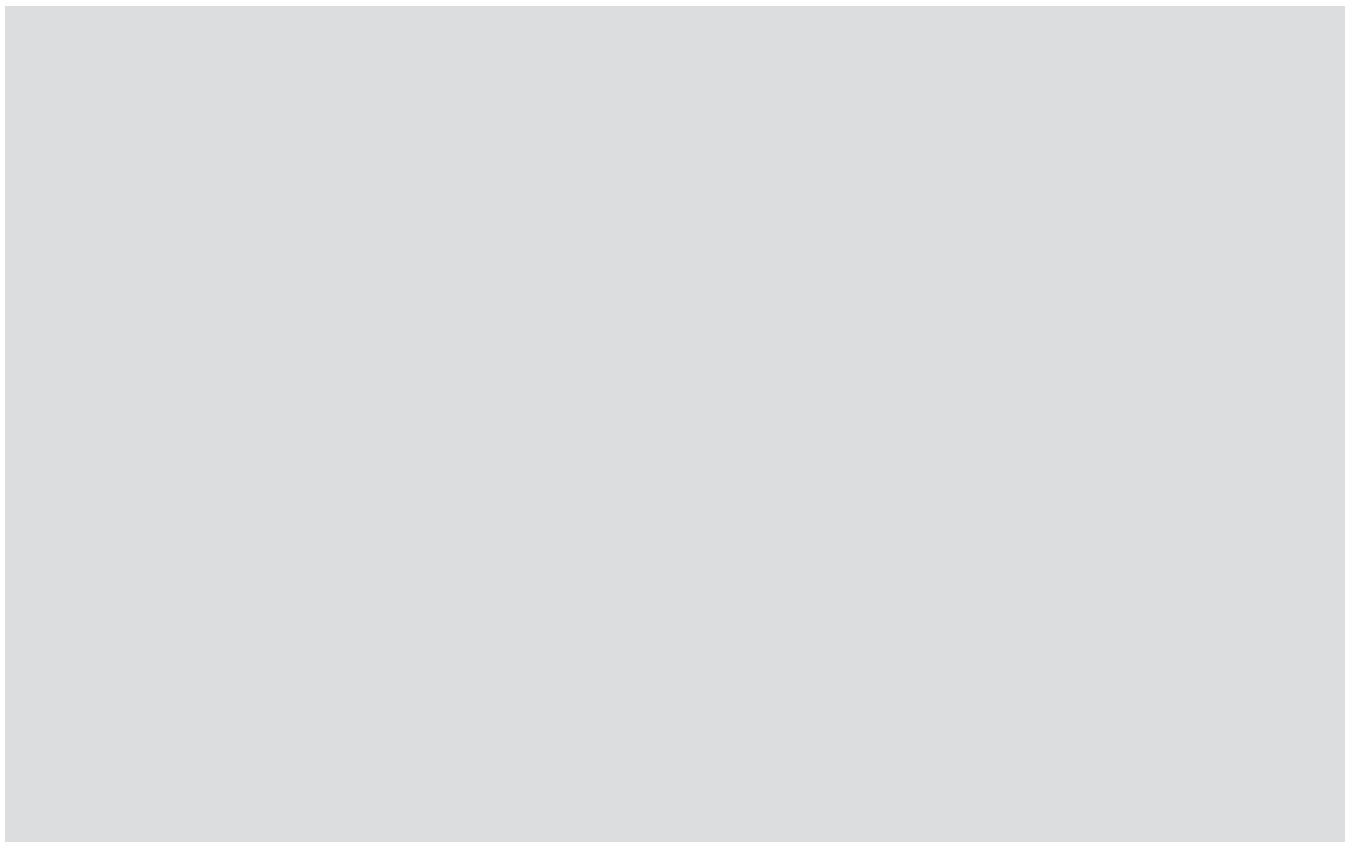
Research Overview

Civic Infrastructure Scan

Semi-structured qualitative interviews with key local leaders/organizations, media and social media analysis, and desk research.

- 15 interviews
 - Boulder City Staff and Councilmembers, Community Organizations/Resident Local Media, and Academia.
 - The demographics of interviewees are: 8 Caucasians, 5 people of color, 9 women.
- Desk research

Notes:



Scorecard Results

Board Meetings

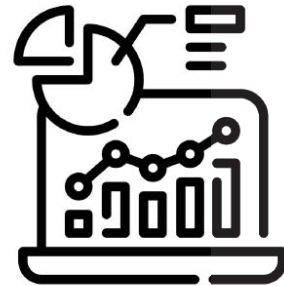
- Overall experience: 48% good, 29% neutral
- Participation: 78% in-person / 22% online, 86% not first time attending
- Thoughts on better meetings: 76% thought the council meetings provided a chance for people to be heard, but 40% want clarity on how public input influences decisions

Community Connections

- 42.5% say neighbors help each other, but 52.5% say the same people are always involved
- 50% say different groups don't mix

Demographics

- 54.1% female, 43.2% over 40 years old, 40.5% white, and 62.2% long time resident



Notes:

What Are Interviewees Saying?

- “There’s a difference between being heard and being listened to...not just conceding to the most prominent voices in the room.”
- “When you are a community member [at Council Meetings], you’re sort of talking to straight faces who aren’t responsive. When you’re elected, you’re hearing from people at the wrong moment in a project.”
- “Meetings can be intimidating and uncomfortable if you don’t know the right way (or the expected way) to communicate.”



Notes:

Research Informed Recommendations

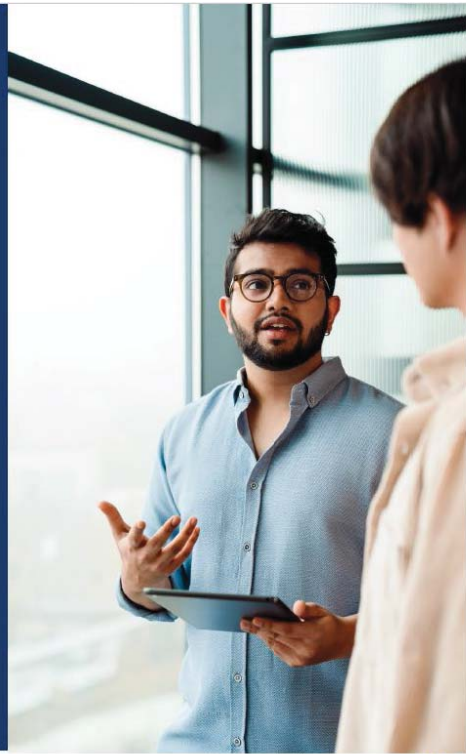
- **Civic Engagement Scorecard - Over ~7 City Council Meetings (quantitative):**
 - Most people felt heard, but many didn't understand how input affected decisions
 - Participation skewed white/older
 - Low first-time speakers
- **Interviews with residents amplified concerns:**
 - Public comment too late in process
 - Format discourages true listening or follow-up
 - Power dynamics and intimidation barriers



Notes:

Recommendations for Change

- Establish participation to foster earlier, more inclusive input (not just after decisions are made)
- Improve demographic diversity of participants
- Make feedback loops transparent — show how public input shapes policy
- Redesign physical spaces and processes to reduce hierarchy and increase comfort



Notes:

Boulder's First Community & Council Forum

- Sept. 26, 2024
- 9 elected officials & 20 residents (10 invited from under-represented groups / 10 via sortition at the meeting)
- Plenary presentation on economic vitality, Q&A, small groups with 2 elected officials per table, report-out, Q&A
- First of its kind – revamped 'study session'
- With positive results aim to become regular facet of civic engagement infrastructure



Notes:

Boulder's First Community & Council Forum

Replace standard public comment format with a deliberative forum:

- Roundtable seating; council members and residents together
- Facilitated breakout groups; selected participants (half from historically excluded groups, half lottery)
- Grounding presentation & plenary/highlights
- Post-event evaluation



Notes:

Community & Council Forum Ratings

- Better overall rating of meeting
 - 47.9% to 100% 'good rating'
- Less 'usual suspects' attending
 - 14% to 54.5% first time attending
- Better interactions/civil dialogue
 - 44% to 80%
- Feeling included sooner
 - 40% agree / 20% strongly agree



Notes:

What Are Interviewees

Saying?

I really enjoyed being able to have a conversation with people from different points of view and with different experiences. It was an interesting and dynamic dialogue. Listening to the final report it was good to feel heard in the quotes made by city council representatives. Thank you.

-Resident

Casual conversation led to less tense hot topics. It seemed to allow everyone to feel heard even when opinions differed.

-Staff

The chance to listen to community members conversations, really listen. Not react or respond.

-Council member



Notes:

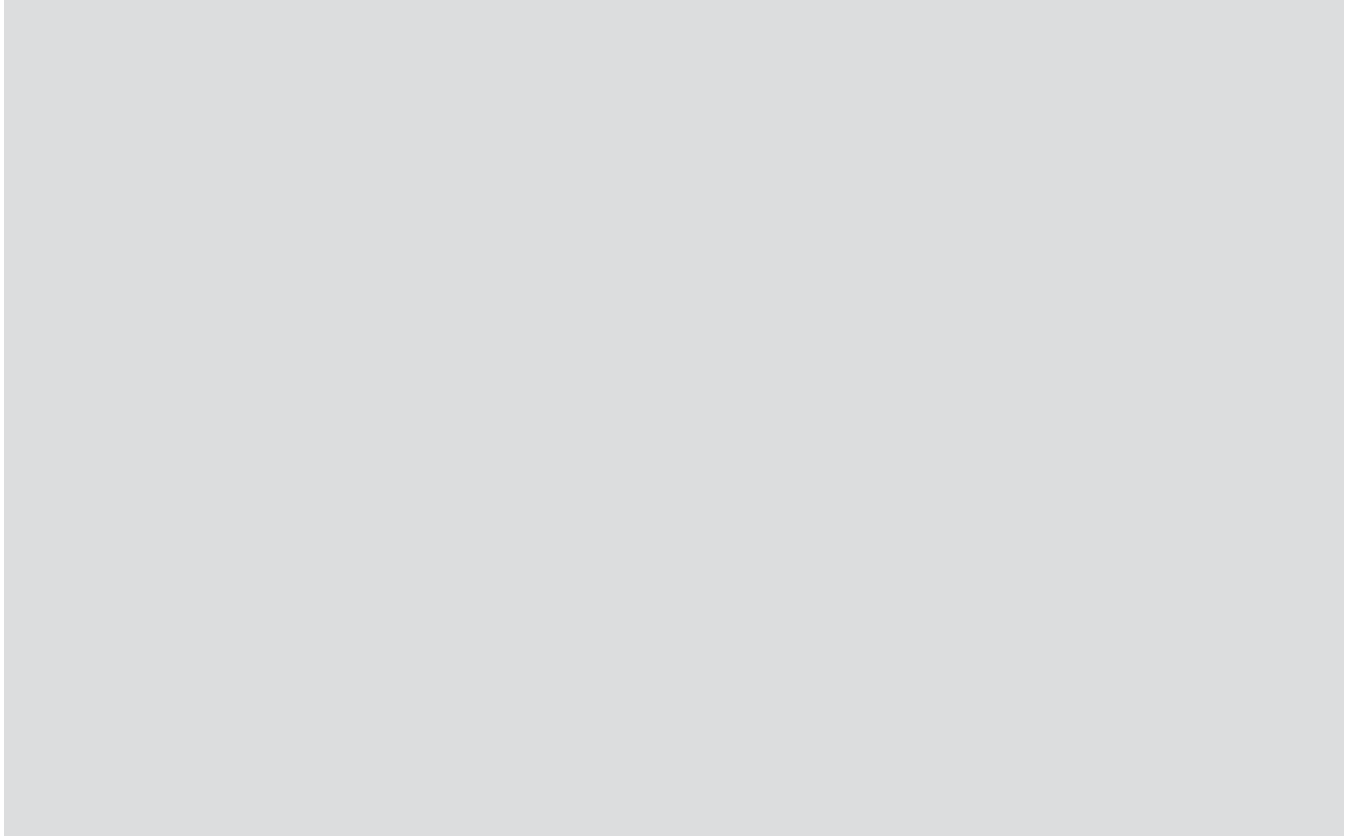
Results of the Report

From the forum and related resident feedback, the city adopted recommendations in its Economic Vitality Strategic Plan:

- Expand support for BIPOC & micro-businesses, home-based and nonprofit businesses
- Micro-loan programs, flexible zoning policy, adaptive reuse incentives
- Affordable Commercial Space initiative
- Strengthened outreach, business education, reduced barriers for underserved sectors
- Participatory budgeting, better transparency on public funding, stronger feedback mechanisms



Notes:



Mesa, AZ Case Study



mesa
PUBLIC SCHOOLS



ICMA 

Notes:

- Question of the month sent to students and parents to ask for ideas to work on
- Issue chosen
- 15 teams of students set to tackle the issue of cell phone use on high school campuses
- Presentation of results by the STUDENTS before the GOVERNING BOARD
- Post-meeting follow-up of BOARD CHAIR with students

A poster for the Hacktivate MESA Public Schools event. The top half features a hand holding a smartphone with a glowing screen, set against a dark background with faint city lights. The title 'HACKTIVATE MESA PUBLIC SCHOOLS' is prominently displayed in white, bold, sans-serif font. Below the title, the theme 'INNOVATION - RESOLVE - PRESENTATION' is written in a smaller font. A white-bordered box contains the event details: 'NOVEMBER 15, 2024' and 'STUDENT SERVICES CENTER, 8AM - 330PM'. Below this box, the date for the 'BOARD STUDY SESSION: DECEMBER 10, 2024' is listed. A paragraph of text describes the event's purpose: 'Hacktivate will engage students in discovering, studying, analyzing, and presenting solutions to challenges confronting Mesa Public Schools.' A blue link '[MPS HACKTIVATE: CELL PHONES](#)' is provided. The bottom of the poster features three hexagonal images: a colorful geometric cube, a hand pointing at a screen with sticky notes, and a group of people working together.

HACKTIVATE

MESA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

INNOVATION - RESOLVE - PRESENTATION

NOVEMBER 15, 2024
STUDENT SERVICES CENTER, 8AM - 330PM

BOARD STUDY SESSION: DECEMBER 10, 2024

Hacktivate will engage students in discovering, studying, analyzing, and presenting solutions to challenges confronting Mesa Public Schools.

[MPS HACKTIVATE: CELL PHONES](#)

Notes:

Why Is This Better?

- Space is collaborative
- People are in conversation with each other and directly interacting with officials
- There's follow-up, and a throughline to implementation



Notes:



FACILITATING MEETINGS WHERE PEOPLE LIVE, WORK, AND GATHER



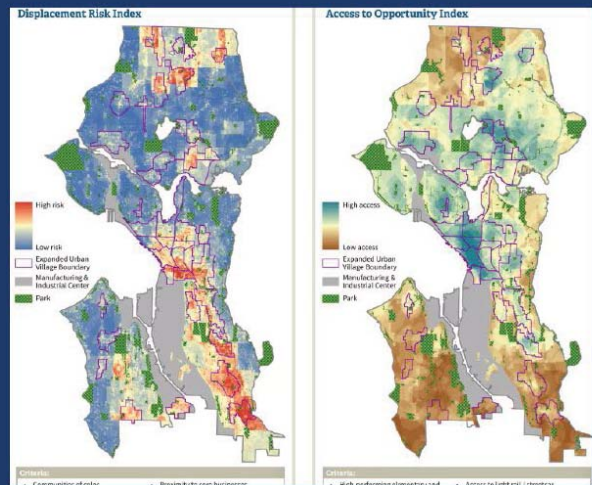
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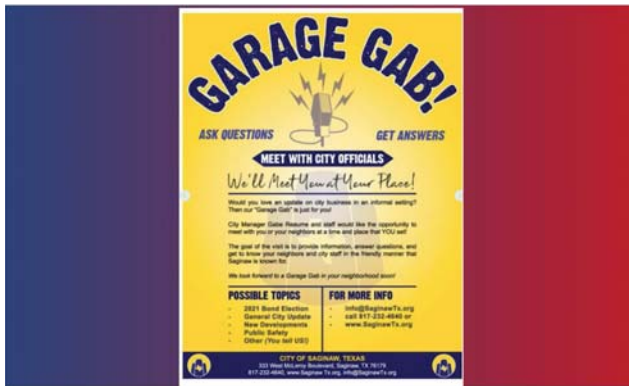
Finding Where Needs are for Outreach and Engagement

Operationalizing the data for Engagement Advisors

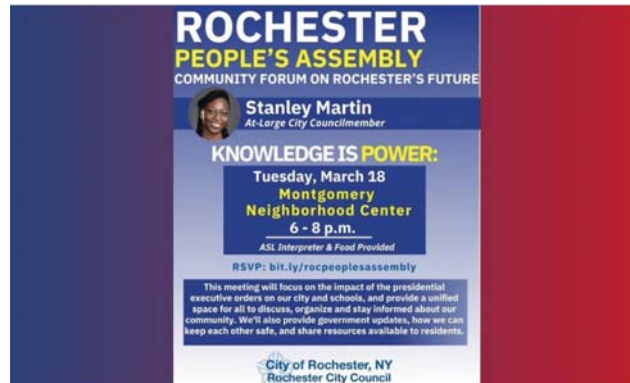
- Translate materials, provide culturally appropriate communication channels
- Organize events, partner with local organizations
- Do door-to-door outreach, pop-up events
- Incentivized participation
- Report back on feedback
- Train staff to avoid harm (like recognize trauma, prevent extractive practices etc.)
- Maps are used as tools for dialogue, help inform capital investment, zoning, program targeting, budgets



Notes:



THE FOURTH SENATE MASHINANI TO BE HELD IN BUSIA COUNTY



Notes:



FACILITATION TOOLS THAT HELP PEOPLE FEEL (AND BE) HEARD



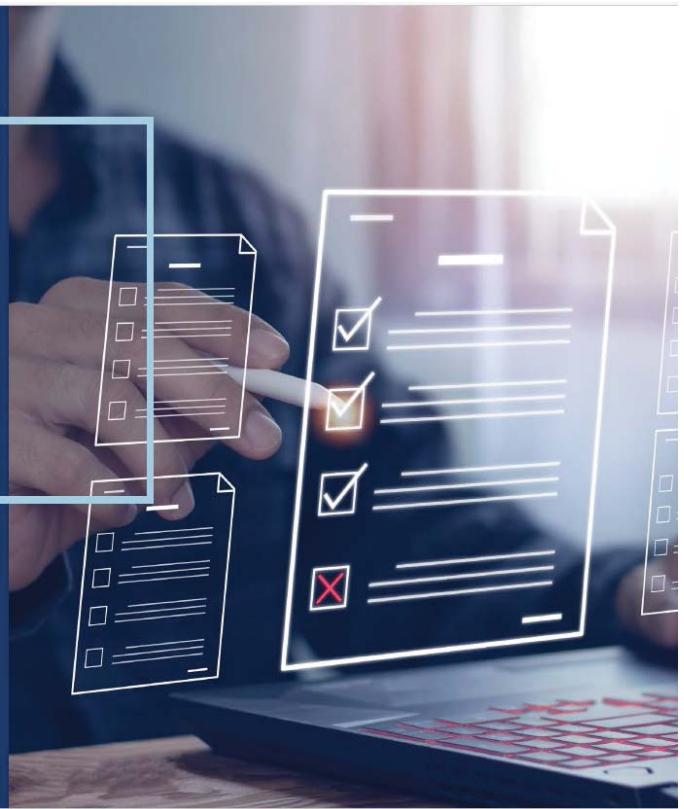
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Let's Try Mentimeter

Notes:

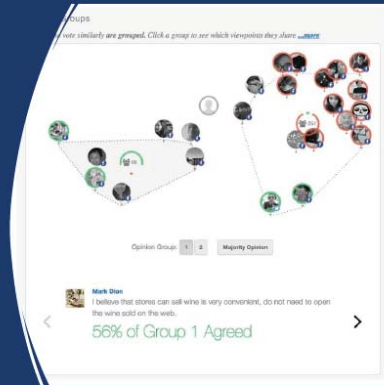
Let's Try Pol.Is



Notes:

Digital Crowdsourcing

- Pol.is, [Decidim](#) are open-source tools to crowd source input. People vote on existing ideas.
- Useful as a generative tool to gather creative or new ideas.
- Creates a visual map of how people align. Uncover difference, agreements, disagreements around specific ideas and topics.



Try the AAC themed pol.is!

bit.ly/AACpolis

Notes:

**What's one idea
or insight you're
taking with you
today?**



Notes:

Take Action

- 01 Take a look at the following readings:

“Civic Engagement Scorecard”

<https://www.nationalcivicleague.org/center-for-democracy-innovation/civic-engagement-scorecard/>

“Guide to local civic measurement”

<https://citizensandscholars.org/research/mapping-civic-measurement/guide-to-civic-measurement/>

- 02 Try out an online poll or a small-group dialogue using the techniques we’ve discussed. Try it in a pilot setting rather than the official council meeting.



Thank You

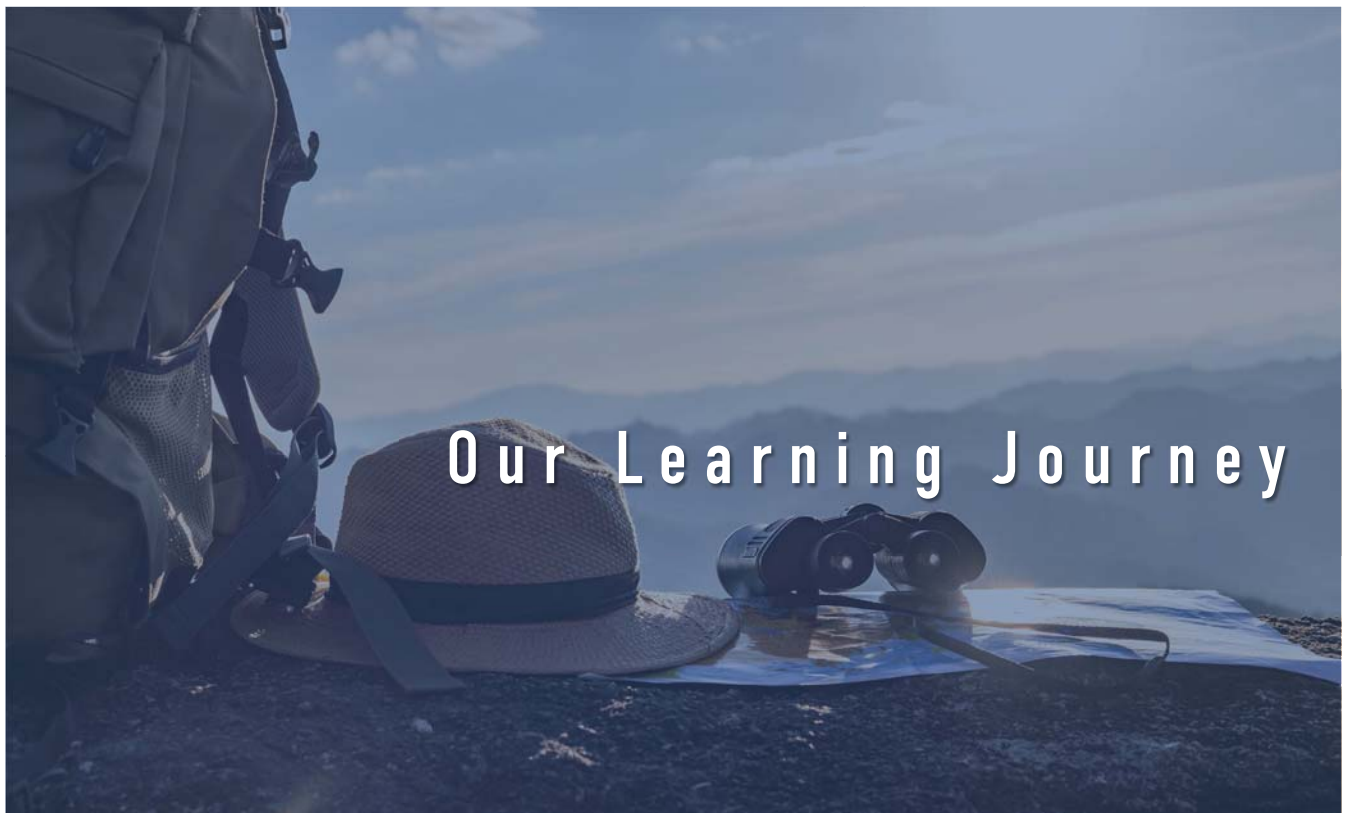
Better Public Meetings Series



Improving Engagement Before, After, and Alongside Public Meetings

Better Public Meetings Series

Workshop 4



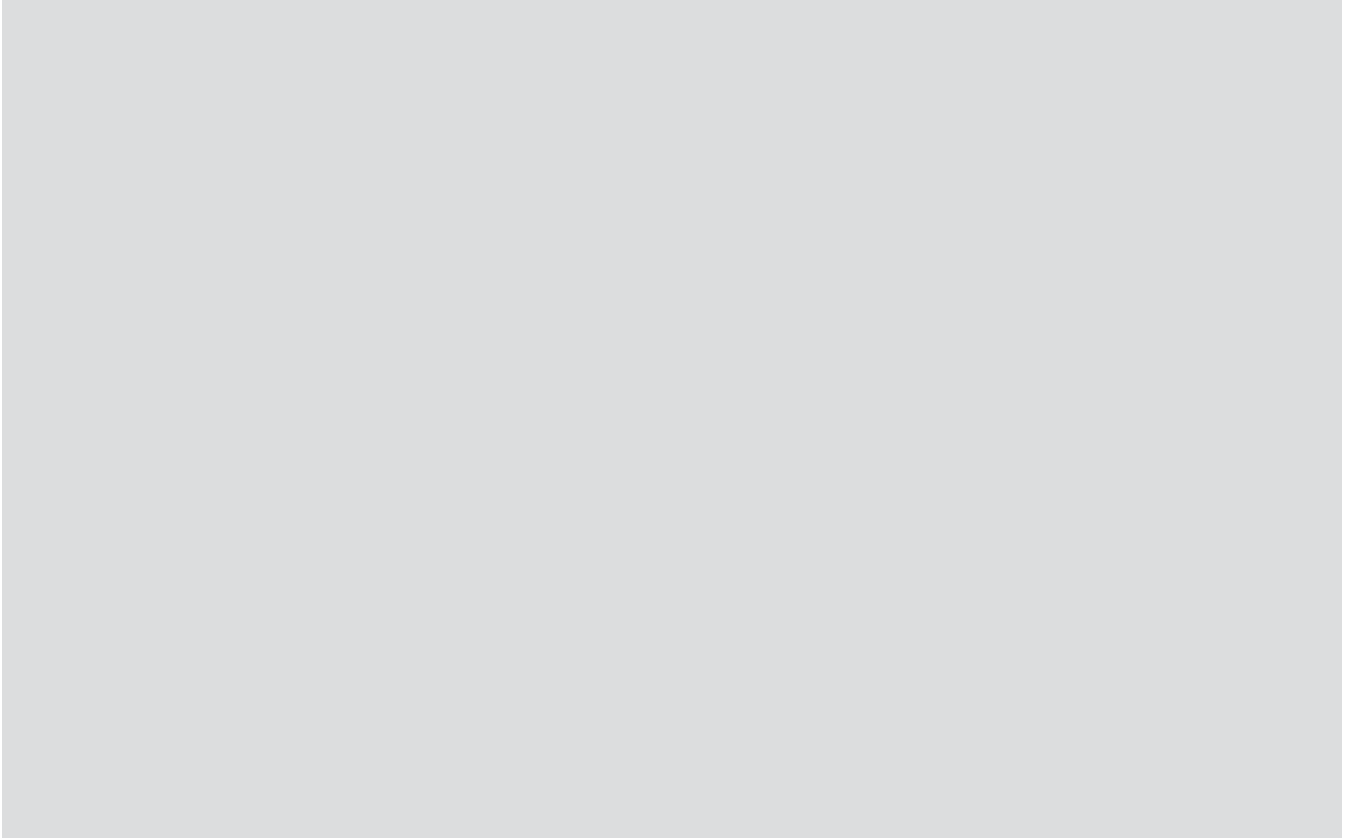
Today, we'll discuss how communities are creating new ways to share information between meetings, using network-based recruitment to engage all populations, and combining digital and in-person strategies to maximize engagement.

Agenda:

Topic	Description
Welcome	Preview the learning journey and discuss key takeaways from Workshop 3.
Engaging the Public	Identify recruitment strategies illustrated through real-life examples.
"Thick" and "Thin" Engagement	Discover different ways to engage the public beyond official public meetings.
Series Wrap-Up	Reflect on what you've learned, what resonated most, and what you plan to implement moving forward.

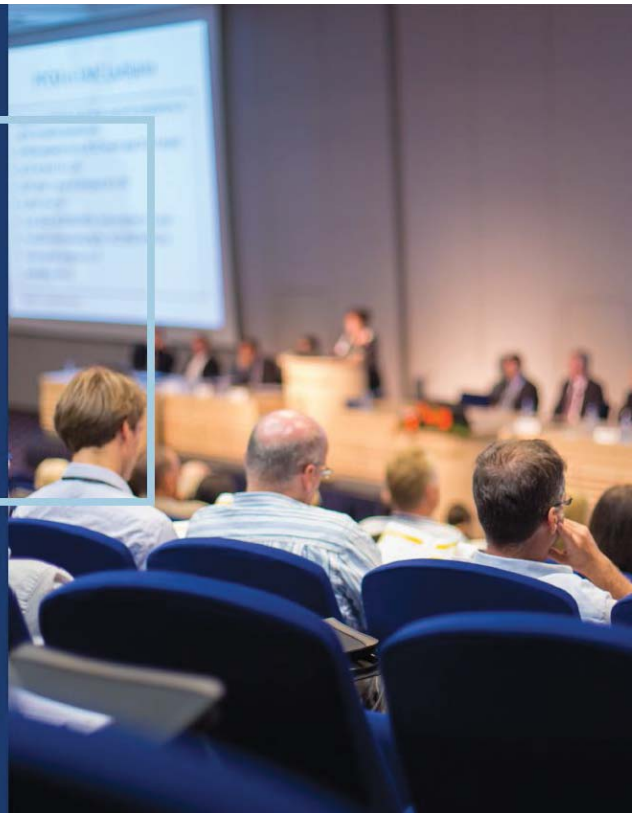


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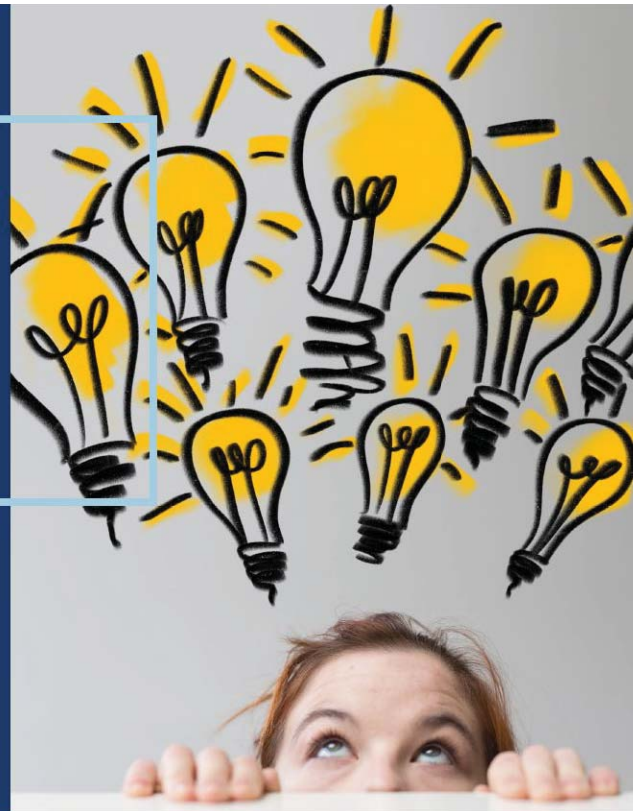
Council meetings aren't the
only way to productively
engage the public.

Not just one, but multiple “Public Meetings” —
each bringing its own benefits.

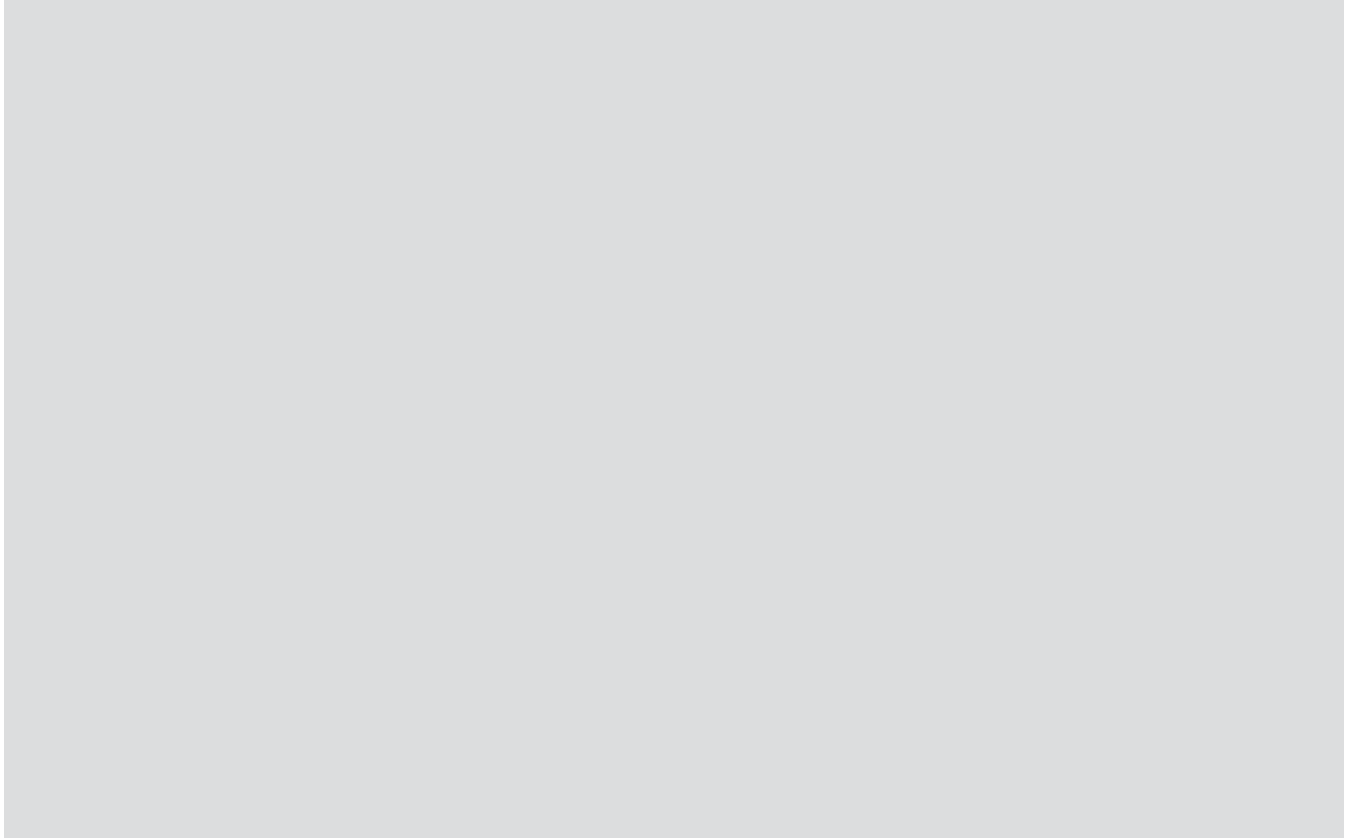


Notes:

There's lots of room to
innovate outside of formal
council chambers.



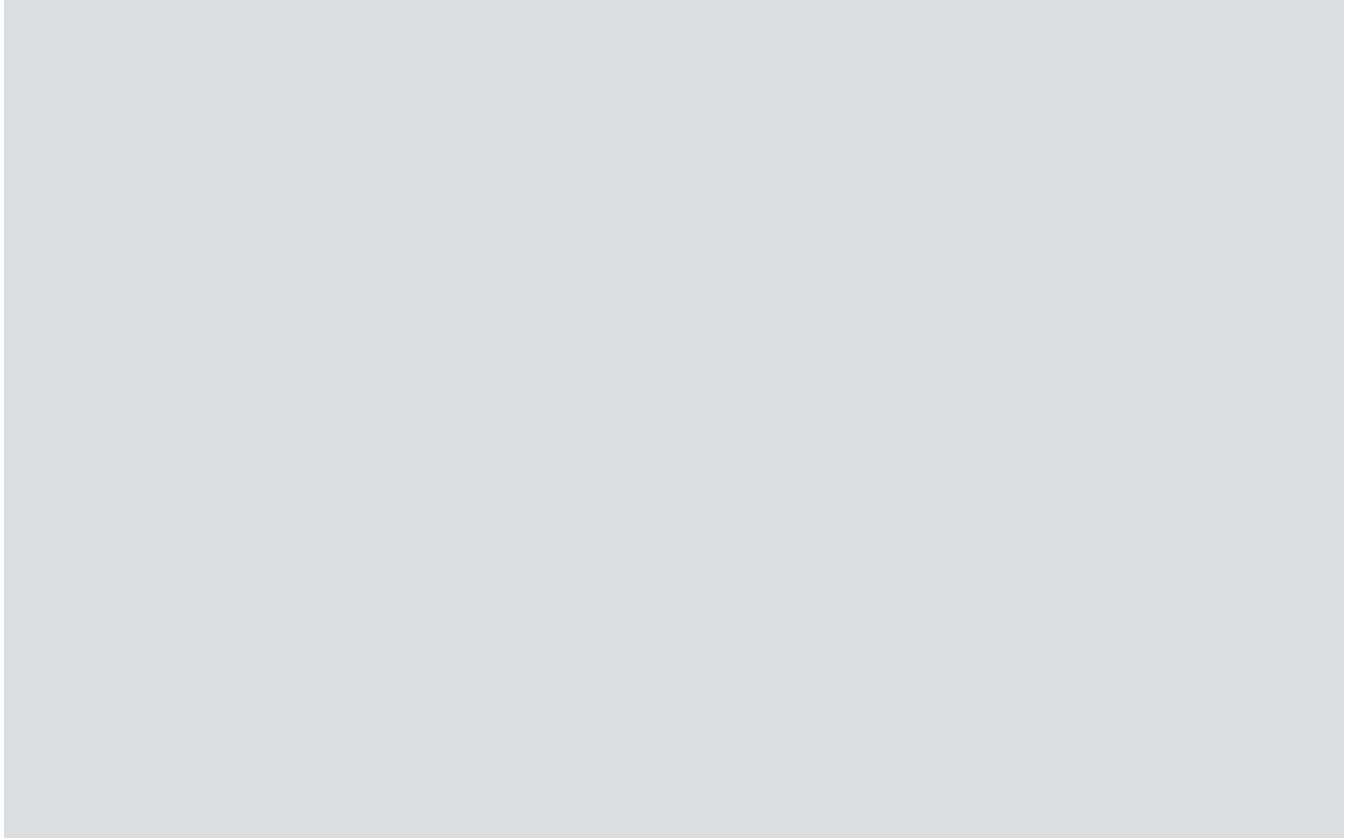
Notes:



Within formal meetings, the Chair often has a legal remit to experiment too. Beyond those settings, there is even greater leeway to pilot and innovate.



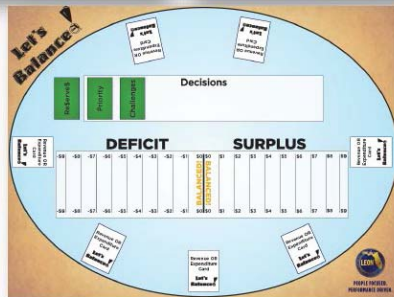
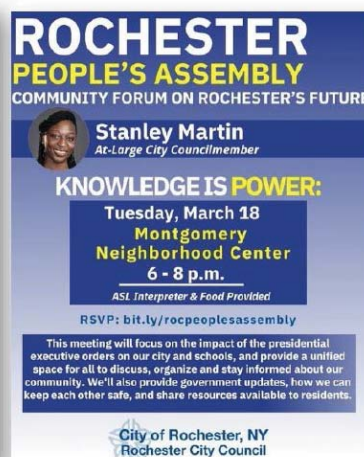
Notes:



Getting More People Involved

- People engage because someone they know and trust asks them!
- Help other groups engage: boards and commissions, neighborhood associations and parent councils, and many more
- Two-way communication through those connections – information, options, ideas
- Use digital tools both to engage and recruit

Notes:



Recruitment: Going to the People, Rotating Spaces

Notes:



Community Connectors

Help Raleigh connect with your community

Recruitment:
Bringing People Along
In-Person, Digitally, and
Through Rotating Spaces

Notes:

PARTICIPATE IN DECATUR'S CHARTER REVIEW PROCESS

What is the City Charter?

The City Charter is Decatur's local constitution. It outlines:

- How the city government is structured.
- The powers and responsibilities of city officials.
- How local laws are made.
- How the City manages its finance.

Charter Review Begins This Fall

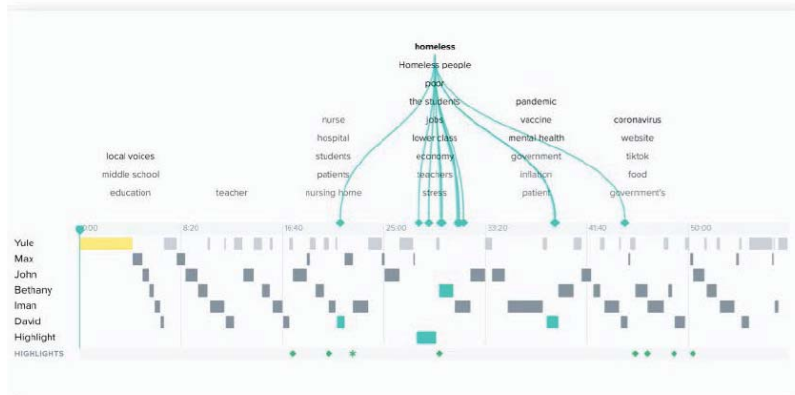
In partnership with the National Civic League, the City of Decatur will begin a full review of the city charter, and you have the opportunity to be a part of it.

SIGN UP TODAY!



Recruitment:
Bringing People Along
In-Person, Digitally, and
Through Rotating Spaces

Notes:



Recruitment:
Bringing People Along
In-Person, Digitally, and
Through Rotating Spaces

Notes:



Your Turn: Share What Works

- What recruitment strategies have you used?
- What new approaches are you considering?



Notes:

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Notes:

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Your Meetings Should Be Part of an Overall Strategy That Mixes “Thick” and “Thin” Engagement

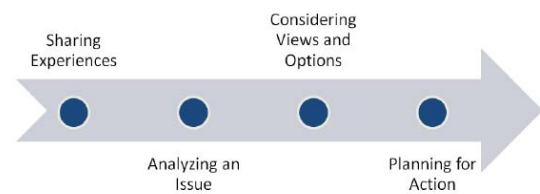


Notes:

"THICK"

ENGAGEMENT

- Small groups
- Can be open to the public, or participants chosen by civic lottery
- Facilitated
- Groups set ground rules
- No more than one elected official per group
- Process for summarizing/sharing ideas



Notes:

"THIN"

ENGAGEMENT

- Survey panels
- Hybrid processes using texting, survey platforms – bring the meeting to where people are
- Digital tools for ideation, crowdfunding, finding common ground
- Social engagement – food, fun, kids



Notes:

“Thick” Examples

Citizen Assemblies



Notes:

Why Use a Citizens' Assembly?

01

To include the public. Examine broad policies and issues that are politically deadlocked or don't have a clear answer.

02

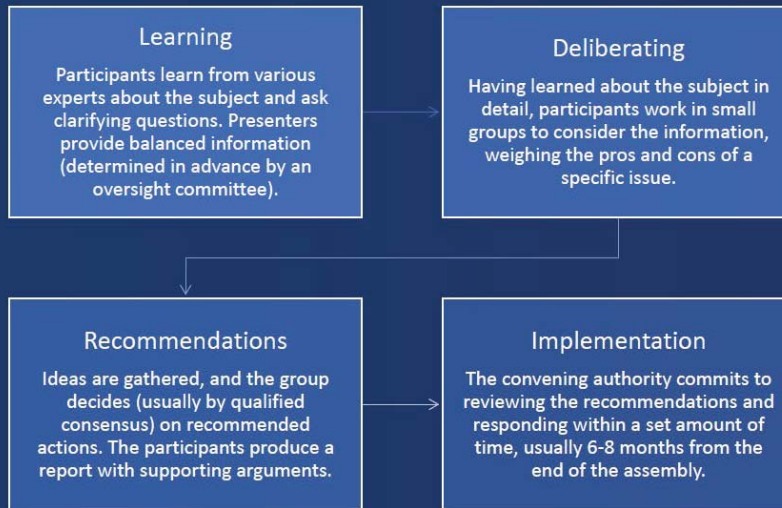
To make assessments. Weigh policy options through two-way communication and make recommendations that are collectively agreed upon.

03

To change opinions and build trust. We learn what the public thinks and observe new ways of thinking about issues, people and institutions.

Notes:

What Are the Stages?



Notes:

Citizen Assemblies

Pros

- **Time:** Decisions are made by reasoned arguments, informed by hours of learning
- **Representation:** Participants encounter people from all walks of life
- **Empowerment:** The public makes their own decisions without political influence

Cons

- **Cost:** Citizens' Assemblies will range based on the group size (which includes stipends). General costs are \$250k+
- **Political Will:** If a referendum doesn't determine decisions, it's up to politicians to determine implementation.
- **Rarity:** Citizens' Assemblies can tend to be one-off experiences despite their success.

Notes:



More Thin Engagement: Digital Tools

General purpose	Some representative examples
Crowdsourcing and ideation	AllOurIdeas; MindMixer; IdeaScale
Gathering feedback on problems and services	SeeClickFix; FixMyStreet; PublicStuff
Crowdfunding	Kickstarter; ioby
Petitions	Change.org
Games	@stake; Community PlanIt; Civic IDEA
Mapping and wikis	LocalWiki; OpenStreetMap
Illustrating options and voting on them	Metroquest; Ethelo
Hyperlocal community-building	Nextdoor; Front Porch Forum
Finding common ground in large groups	Pol.is
Polling	Mentimeter

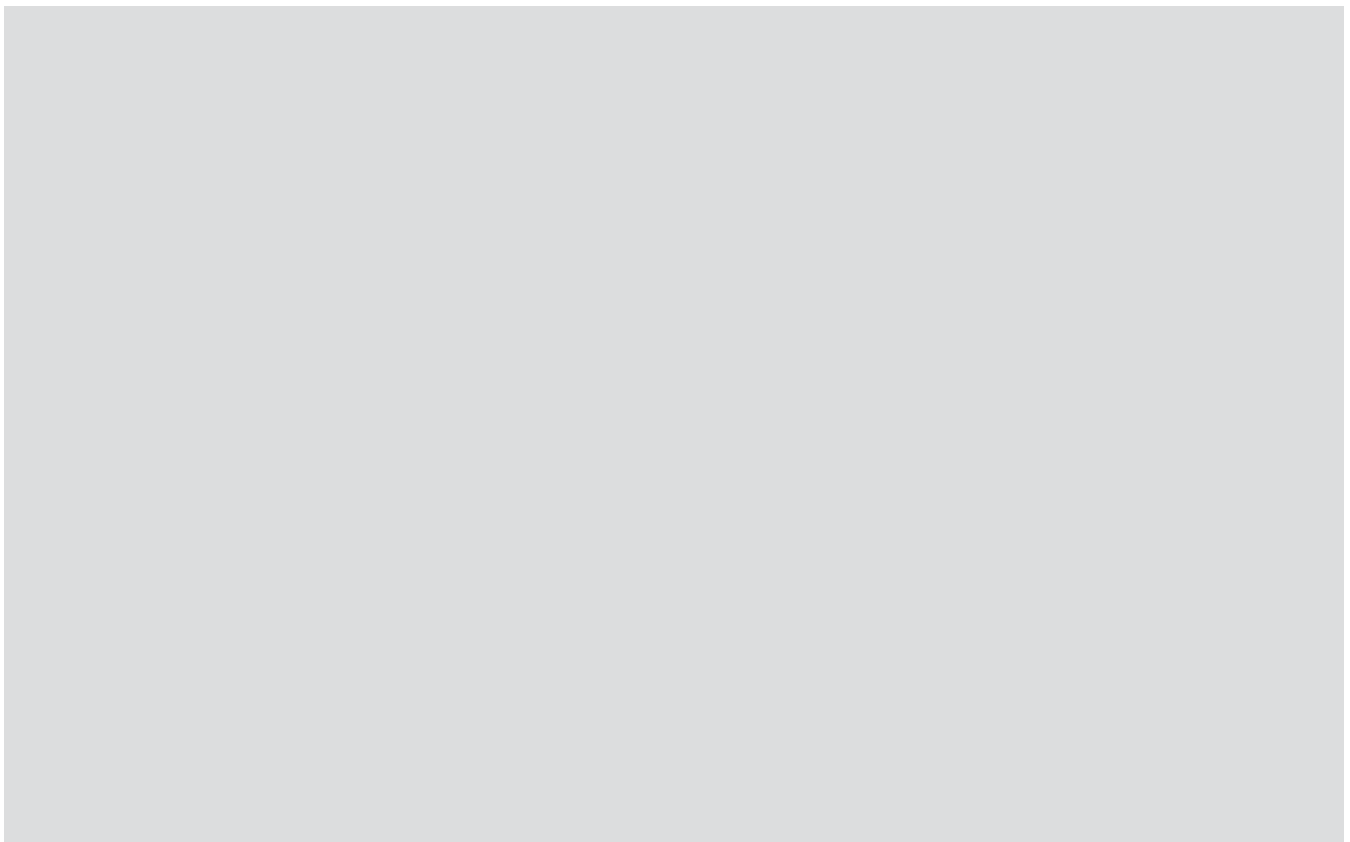
Thin: Ongoing Engagement Centered on Food

Regular events that are:

- Convenient
- Fun
- Informed
- Kid-friendly
- Trust-building



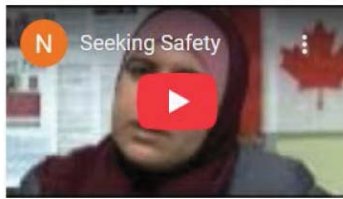
Notes:



What are some ways
you've engaged the public,
especially around food or
family-friendly events?



Notes:



Seeking Safety

Agincourt Community Services Association (ACSA)

The Safety Ambassadors at the Dorset Park Hub demonstrate the power of resident-led social change. Discover how they transformed their neighbourhood and inspired their community.

Participatory
documentaries of
lived experiences

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8BldICuht8>

Thin: Digital Tools

1. A web-browser-based VR design platform enabling live interaction between multi-users (up to 100 CAS) building on the gaming platform threeJS;

2. A headset-based VR visualization platform enabling users to review the latest collective design in 360 degrees, complete with interactive viewing and feedback interactions. This was created via Yulio and could be viewed via a mobile/tablet device and web browser.



Virtual reality with
seniors on park space
redevelopment

Notes:

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8BldICuht8>

Our hotline is active from 10am-4pm, 7 days a week at 647-873-2230.

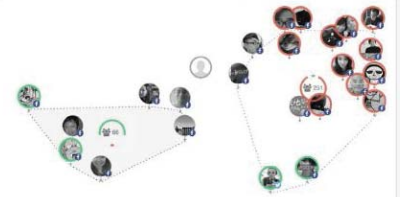


Mutual aid hotlines
and online
marketplaces

Thin: Digital Tools

Opinion Groups

People who vote similarly are grouped. Click a group to see which viewpoints they share. [more](#)



Mark Dion
I believe that stores can sell wine is very convenient, do not need to open
the wine sold on the web.

56% of Group 1 Agreed

Pol.is online voting
of public ideas

Notes:

Thick and Thin: Participatory Budgeting



Notes:

Thick and Thin: Participatory Budgeting

- Money that citizens decide how to spend
- A structured process – citizens brainstorm, research, and develop proposals, working with gov't officials, staff (the thick part)
- Citizens vote on proposals (the thin part)
- Can have multiple levels – city, region, state

Notes:

BOROUGH ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE

--ROAD MAP--

1

Assembly 1 Introduction & Relationship Building

- Introduction to the BAC process
- Members meet and learn from each other's lived-experience
- Subcommittees form and begin reading community-submitted ideas

2

Assembly 2 Information Gathering

- The Assembly Learns the borough's demographic data
- Subcommittees conduct initial project reviews
- Subcommittees develop information requests to help make informed decisions on the projects

3

Assembly 3 Learning & Vetting

- Subcommittees learn from answered information requests
- Subcommittees select top 3 to 4 project ideas per subcommittee
- The Assembly Conducts a project mapping activity to verify and connect the final 15 to 20 projects
- Preliminary vote

4

Assembly 4 Refine & Vote

- Subcommittees refine top 3-4 projects with subject matter resources
- The assembly reviews and provides feedback on projects
- Final deliberation
- Final vote



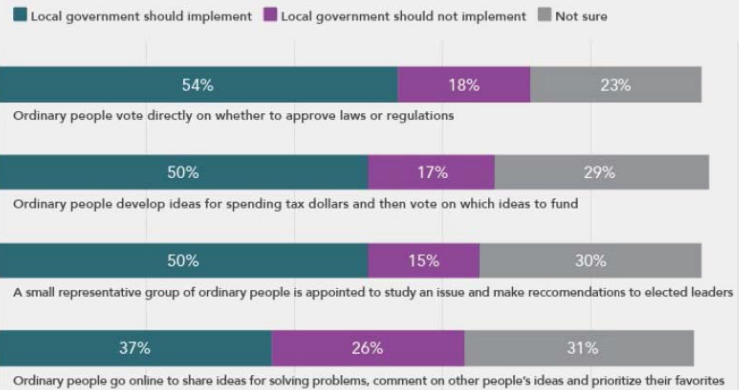
Combining Citizens' Assemblies and Participatory Budgeting

Notes:

People Want More Influence

About half of Americans say their local government should implement systems to give people more decision-making power.

Figure 11. Percent of Americans who say their local government should or should not implement each of the following systems or that they are not sure, 2019 survey:



Base: All respondents, N=1,000.

Numbers do not add up to 100 percent owing to the 5 percent of respondents who either refused the question or responded "Depends" or "My local government already does this" and are not represented in the figure.

Source: Yankelovich Democracy Monitor, 2020



Notes:

What Type of Influence Do They Want – Voice, Budget...

People would be more likely to get involved in local issues if they had decision-making power.

Figure 12. When there is an issue in their local community that they feel needs to be addressed, percent who say how each of the following would impact their likelihood to get involved, 2019 survey:



Base: All respondents, N=1,000.

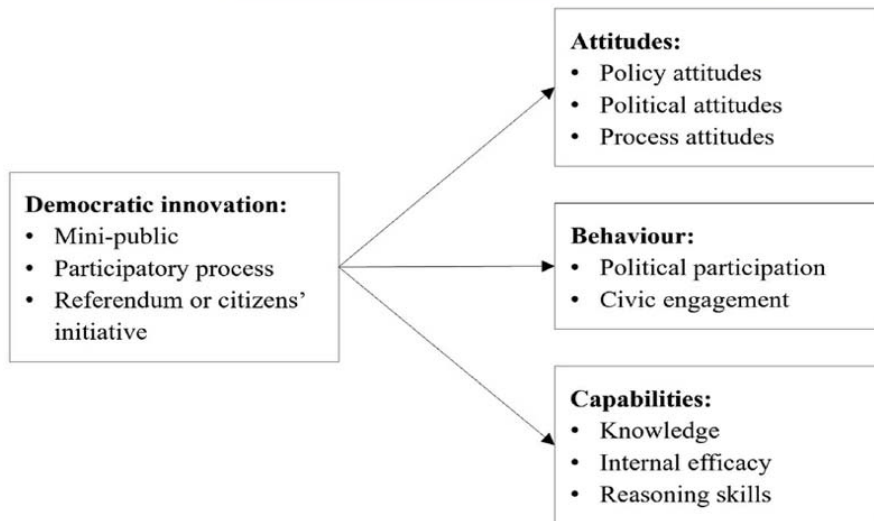
Source: Yankelovich Democracy Monitor, 2020



Notes:

Transforming Public Attitudes Through Innovation:

What Does the Data Tell Us



Notes:

Improving Your Systems

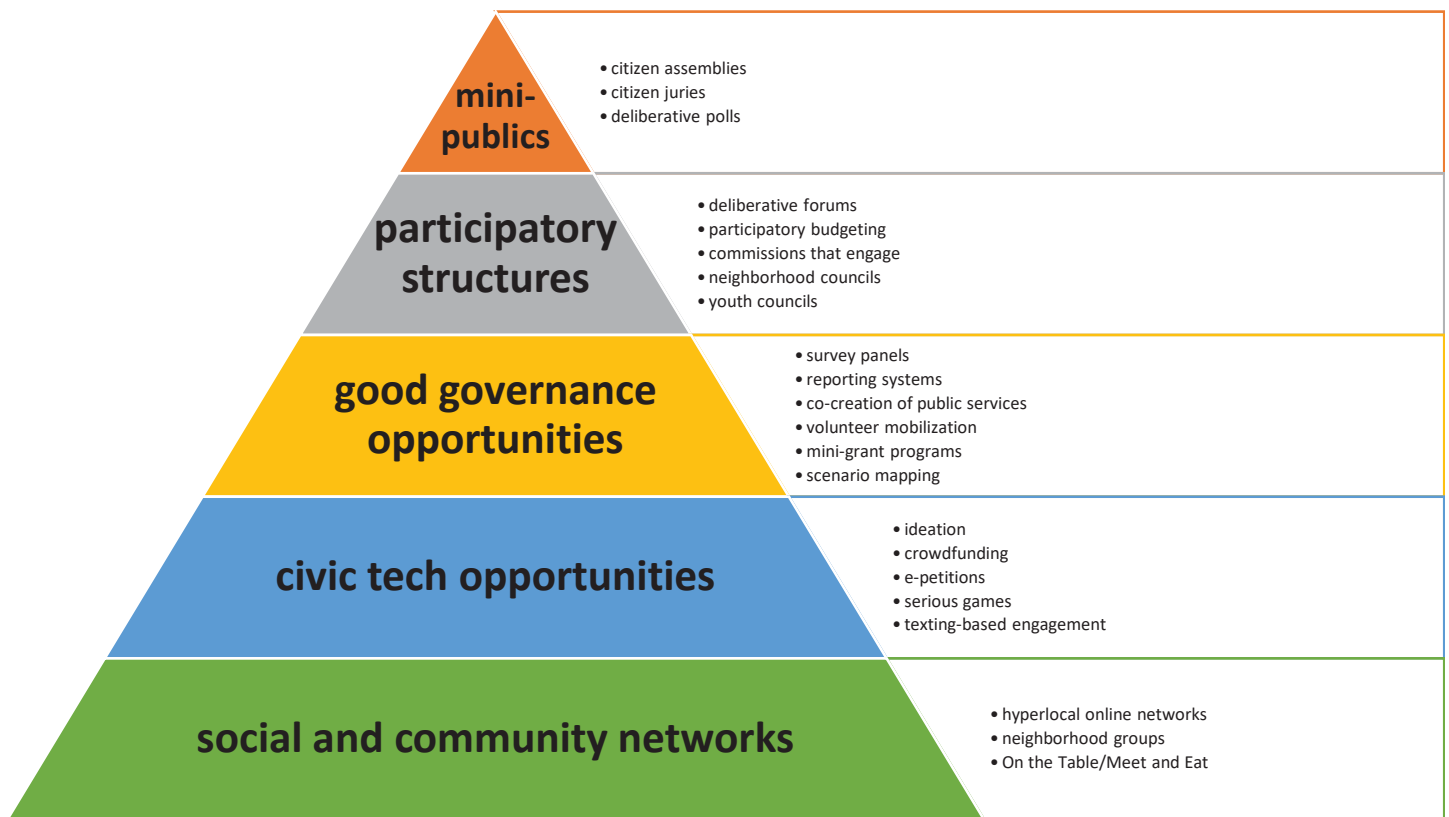
- Using a democracy innovation once may have impacts – but it is difficult and hard to sustain
- How do you embed these tools and processes in how governments work?
- How do you embed them in the ‘ground floor of democracy’ – neighborhood associations, grassroots groups, local online networks
- How do you create a supportive legal framework?
- How can engagement commissions champion, support, and measure this work?



Notes:



A Pyramid of Democracy Innovations





Notes:

A large, empty rectangular area with a light gray background, intended for taking notes.

From Learning to Action: What You Can Do (1 of 3)

You can:

- Explore different ways to help people feel (and be) heard in public meetings: <https://www.nationalcivicleague.org/what-do-people-need-to-feel-heard/>
- Consider how you can make public meetings welcoming spaces.
- **Keep in mind the three core needs of a meeting:**
 - Get officials what they need
 - Showcase the work of staff
 - Gather public input



Notes:

Link: <https://www.nationalcivicleague.org/what-do-people-need-to-feel-heard/>

From Learning to Action: What You Can Do (2 of 3)

You can:

- Modify your agenda using strategies shared in Workshop #2—before, during, and after the meeting.
- Rethink your public comment time. Focus on four needs:
 - Efficiency
 - Avoiding polarization
 - Access
 - Accountability
- Use platforms like *Lakewood Speaks* to collect public comments.
- Measure your meeting effectiveness using a scorecard.

Notes:

From Learning to Action: What You Can Do (3 of 3)

You can:

- Strengthen your facilitation by attending to: room design, topic selection, learning, deliberating, making decisions, accessibility
- Facilitate a pre-meeting dialogue or crowdsourcing session.
- Close the feedback loop—how will you show the public their input mattered?
- Apply lessons from the Boulder, CO or Mesa, AZ case studies in your community.
- Try tools like Mentimeter, Pol.is, or Decidim to gather public input.
- Experiment with new outreach strategies.
- Explore different ways to engage the public—consider both thick and thin engagement strategies.



Notes:



Notes:



Head-Heart-Hands

- Head: What did you learn?
- Heart: What resonated with you personally?
- Hands: What will you do with what you learned?

Take a few minutes to think about the above, then feel free to share your responses.



Notes:



Thank You

Better Public Meetings Series

ICMA

