STRENGTHENING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN EDMONTON

Edmonton

OPEN CITY

cpi Centre for Public Involvement

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
FACULTY OF EXTENSION

May 2015

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the Centre for Public Involvement Research & Writing team:

Fiona Cavanagh, Executive Director, *Centre for Public Involvement*
Zane Hamm, Research & Program Coordinator, *Centre for Public Involvement*
Mary Pat MacKinnon, Vice President, Public Engagement, *H+K Strategies Canada*
Susanna Haas Lyons, Public Engagement Specialist
David Kahane, Professor, Department of Political Science, *University of Alberta*
Matt Leighninger, Lead Author, Executive Director, *Deliberative Democracy Consortium (DDC)*
Roger Graves, Plain Language Editing; Director, Writing Across the Curriculum, *University of Alberta*
Iwona Faferek, Designer

City of Edmonton Staff:

Cory Segin, Manager, *Office of Public Engagement*
Claire Ashton, Project Coordinator, *Council Initiative on Public Engagement*

The Centre for Public Involvement (CPI) developed this report for the City of Edmonton Council Initiative on Public Engagement. Some of the content for this report has been adapted from Matt Leighninger's forthcoming book, *Public Participation for 21st Century Democracy* (Leighninger and Nabatchi 2015).

ABOUT CPI

The Centre for Public Involvement (CPI) is a centre of excellence to advance the practice and scholarship of public involvement.

Founded through a partnership between the City of Edmonton and the University of Alberta, CPI brings together researchers, citizens, policy makers, public servants, industry, and students through partnerships and projects to explore a wide range of issues. Through community collaboration, CPI tests innovative processes and promotes meaningful civic engagement.

www.centreforpublicinvolvement.com

CONTENTS

1. Executive Summary 2

2. The Benefits of Recognizing
Citizen Competency and Commitment 6

3. Civic Infrastructure
A. Practice of Engagement 10

B. Culture of Engagement..... 17

C. Structure of Engagement 21

4. Putting it all together:
A. Envisioning a better engagement infrastructure 29

B. Planning engagement infrastructure.....32

C. Conclusion 34

5. Resources 35

HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

This document summarizes the state of the art in public engagement, and relates these lessons and innovations to the Edmonton experience. The first section describes the key elements of productive engagement and what it can accomplish. The following three sections focus on the techniques and assets that contribute to the practice, culture, and structure of engagement. The final two sections explore how to put all this information together in visions and plans for public engagement in Edmonton. This document was prepared for the City of Edmonton Council Initiative on Public Engagement.

This report provides information about general engagement, followed by specific examples from Edmonton, and an invitation to think about examples and ideas that are relevant to Edmonton. The full paper and resources are available on the City of Edmonton and Centre for Public Involvement websites to guide further exploration of engagement in Edmonton.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

Like many cities, Edmonton is grappling with how to engage citizens. We want to engage citizens in making decisions, solving problems, and building community. Unlike many cities, Edmonton has a strong foundation for success in public engagement in the past and present. Elected leaders are committed to developing a strong vision for the future.

There are many different projects, initiatives, and organizations that have contributed to public engagement in Edmonton. Included in this list are the city's 157 community leagues, the Office of Public Engagement, the NextGen youth program, and the Centre for Public Involvement. The people involved in these efforts face many challenges and opportunities, but their experiences add to our knowledge about how to engage people in a variety of ways. With their help, Edmonton can move from a pattern of occasional engagement processes to a more coherent, comprehensive "Open City" system of public participation.

Public engagement can help communities make difficult decisions and solve formidable problems. It can help protect our rights, promote social justice and fairness, and improve our quality of life.

Engagement is sometimes characterized as the interaction that makes democracy work.

It might be more accurate to say that engagement by ordinary citizens supplies the democracy in a political system. Without them, city government is dominated by officials, experts, and lobbyists. The greatest challenge we now face is how to transform engagement systems to allow us to tap citizens' full, democratic, problem-solving potential.

The Council Initiative on Public Engagement is working to revitalize public engagement in the City of Edmonton. Public engagement, civil society, direct democracy, collaborative governance: When we talk about public engagement what do we mean? If we agree that public engagement is important, what does good public engagement look like? To help answer these questions and to create a process to strengthen public engagement in Edmonton, City Council created the Council Initiative on Public Engagement.

For Phase I of the initiative, more than 400 people participated in over 20 workshops to share their wisdom. For Phase II, they will define and implement public engagement improvement strategies, reaching out to indigenous, multi-cultural and newcomer populations, and others to ensure a diverse and inclusive process.

This report highlights best and promising practices of public engagement, and illustrates how public engagement is changing to be more participatory and inclusive. It provides a framework for strengthening ***civic infrastructure***, which is a comprehensive system and support for engagement that includes three key components: ***practice, culture*** and ***structure***.

"Citizen engagement" is different from the more general term "citizen participation." Imagine a "spectrum" composed of four goals: to inform, consult, engage, and collaborate with citizens. The emphasis is on an "active, intentional partnership between the general public and decision makers."

(Lukensmeyer & Hasselblad Torres, 2006).

A VISION FOR ENGAGEMENT

The challenge we now face in Edmonton and around the world is to transform systems to make the most of citizens' democratic and problem-solving potential.

This document emphasizes how we can walk toward a future where we have a civic infrastructure, a coherent, comprehensive system for engagement. This system includes a culture of engagement and the practices and structures to realize excellence.

Here are five concrete suggestions for Edmonton:

1. Evaluate public engagement and its impacts

Bring together citizens, city staff, and community members - from across sectors - to develop shared success indicators and ways that we as a City will measure impact.

This report offers ideas for imagining many different kinds of spaces—connected with government, community organizations, and businesses—that build the skills we need to participate effectively in politics and collaborate on our toughest problems like poverty, homelessness and First Nations justice and reconciliation.

Imagine Edmonton as a city where citizens feel heard, respected, and trust City decision making processes, even when they don't get their way on a big issue. We can:

Widely share information through the web and apps about how we're doing against these indicators, in particular consultations, and in general — the Open City dashboard might host this.

Use online technology to collect data about people's perceptions of public engagement, and our impact. Involve community members in this process.

2. Be ambitious about inclusion

Ask tough questions about who is at the table, who is excluded, and how we are going to address systemic and structural barriers to participation in Edmonton.

Imagine a city where everyone can participate fully, equally, and meaningfully, including those who have historically been marginalized such as First Nations people, LGBTQ people, homeless people, recent immigrants, and others. Is it easy to find and use the information about how to get involved?

There are research and practical tools that exist to support this:

We can develop training that builds capacity for inclusion, across organizations.

We can strengthen relationships between community groups, and with the City, to remake our approaches to ensure engagement more inclusive.

We can use data and analytics to understand who's participating, who's not and why.

We can build questions of inclusion, voice, and social justice into our planning processes.

3. Make engagement fun, creative and accessible

This report offers ideas for innovative and new forms of citizen participation as a regular part of decision making. For example:

Work with visual artists and design students to develop infographics and approaches that bring complex technical issues alive.

Make democracy fun – participatory games can support learning and build community.

We can use online platforms – for example, have an easily accessible online map of neighbourhoods that show new zoning developments, and how to get involved.

4. Build capacity for learning to support participation

We can develop distinct Edmonton innovations and adapt those from other jurisdictions—like Civics 101 – to support leadership, training, and skills to improve practice.

5. Value and recognize excellence in engagement

We can create annual Edmonton Public Engagement awards to recognize excellence in engagement — for individuals, community groups, and businesses. The criteria can be based on international standards of excellence, and criteria that is 'home grown' in Edmonton.

What is the kind of democracy we should aspire to have in Edmonton?

Public engagement is more than a governmental responsibility. A strong, healthy democracy benefits every community member, every organization, and every local leader. City Hall plays a key role in improving and sustaining local democracy, but it cannot bear the whole burden of implementing it.

If you're reading this, it's because you too have a vision of what Edmonton or your city could be, if we reached our full potential engaging citizens and communities.

As we define next steps for engagement, let's be ambitious, commit resources, and above all, continue to engage diverse citizens and organizations in building a vision of engagement, and figuring out how to make it happen.

THE BENEFITS OF RECOGNIZING CITIZEN COMPETENCY & COMMITMENT

BENEFITS OF ENGAGEMENT

Public engagement describes the activities by which people's concerns, needs, interests, and values are incorporated into decisions and actions on public matters and issues. However, the essence of good public engagement can be boiled down into one simple analogy: good public engagement means treating citizens like adults.

Effective public engagement, done right, demonstrates respect, recognition, and responsibility that are part of a collaborative relationship:

• **Provide factual information – as much as people want.** Provide meaningful and balanced information. Create projects and online platforms that rely on citizens to help gather and analyze the data.

• **Use sound group process techniques.** Think carefully about agendas, formats, and facilitation rather than accepting conventional formats. This can be the difference between success and failure. This is true of online, as well as face-to-face forms of participation.

• **Give people a chance to tell their stories.** When people have a chance to relate their experiences, they are more likely to learn from each other, be civil toward one another, form stronger relationships, and make the connection between their individual interests and the public good. Over the last twenty years, storytelling in small group formats has been a core component of successful face-to-face engagement. Social media provides a platform for storytelling that is not bound by time and space.

• **Provide choices.** Authentic public engagement opportunities allow citizens to decide for themselves what they think—either in face-to-face settings, or online.

• **Give participants a sense of political legitimacy.** People want to know if what they say really matters. They often ask for some kind of formal or informal legitimacy, and a sense that decision-makers are listening and will respond to their input.

• **Support people to take action in a variety of ways.** Encourage and support citizens to take action in numerous ways, including clicking a link, joining a task force, or cleaning up a park. Some projects result in higher levels of volunteerism. Recognize citizens as problem-solvers, capable of making their own contributions to solving problems.

• **Make engagement enjoyable.** Make the experience enjoyable to encourage participation while also enriching the process.

• **Make engagement easy and convenient.** Organize engagement opportunities that fit easily into busy schedules, in addition to the ones that are more powerful but more time-consuming. People value opportunities that they can seize at the very moment they are confronted with a public problem, or opportunity.

This final attribute of a collaborative relationship is often in tension with the rest: there is an obvious trade-off between convenience and the benefits people receive. The section on Practice will explore this further.

Why is it beneficial to treat citizens like competent, committed contributors? In the short term, good public engagement processes can help communities make decisions, solve problems and realize opportunities.

There are many documented examples of engagement on issues such as land use, crime prevention, education, racism and discrimination, immigrant engagement, youth development, budgets, poverty, and economic development. Public engagement can inform decision-making and problem solving. It can:

- **Help people become more informed about public issues.** Awareness of a key set of facts, coupled with a set of recommendations reflecting this new understanding, can inform a policy debate.
- **Help to bridge divides.** When engagement efforts bring together citizens on different sides of a policy debate, they can find common ground and new solutions.
- **Increase the accountability of elected officials.** Engagement can connect citizens and public officials, and inspire more communication.
- **Generate new ideas.** Engagement creates settings where people come up with ideas for new activities, or initiatives. In online "crowdsourcing," a structured process for generating ideas, participants propose solutions, comment on and add to others' proposals, and rank ideas according to which ideas or projects they like best.
- **Help citizens find resources and allies.** Engagement efforts can help people form relationships and find the resources and allies they need to implement their ideas.
- **Develop new leadership.** Engagement provides spaces where new leaders can emerge.
- **Encourage public-private collaboration.** People inside and outside government can work together to solve problems. This co-creation, or co-production of public goods and services is more likely to happen when citizens, public officials, and public employees come together to compare notes, generate ideas, and take action.

Public participation exercises that reach a large number of people play a key role in the capacity of citizens to change policy. Informing, reconciling, and empowering people has policy impacts only if it achieves a certain scale. Success is more likely with clear information and communication, and if more people are taking action or pressuring their elected representatives.

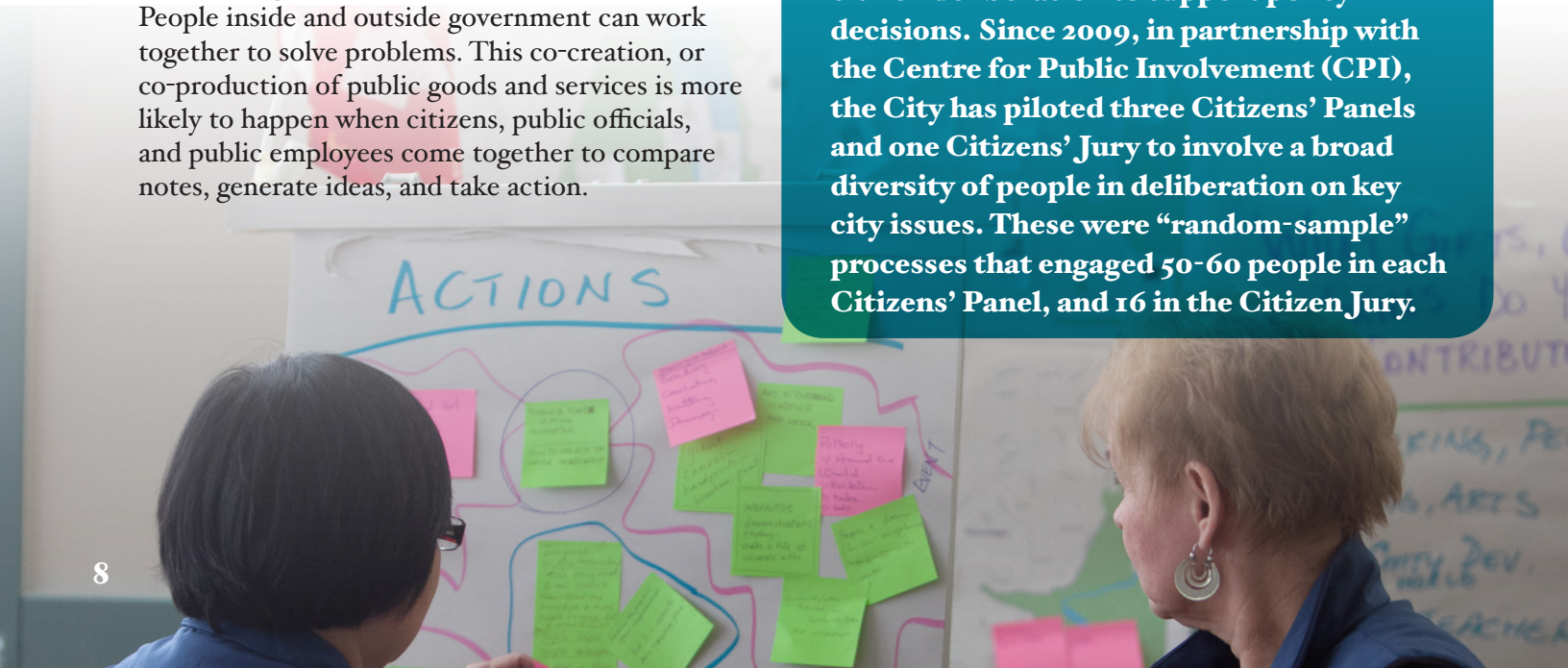
In the long term, engagement that involves citizens in projects over time, or through a process of sustained engagement, seems to have other positive benefits. Examples of more sustained engagement in the Global South include:

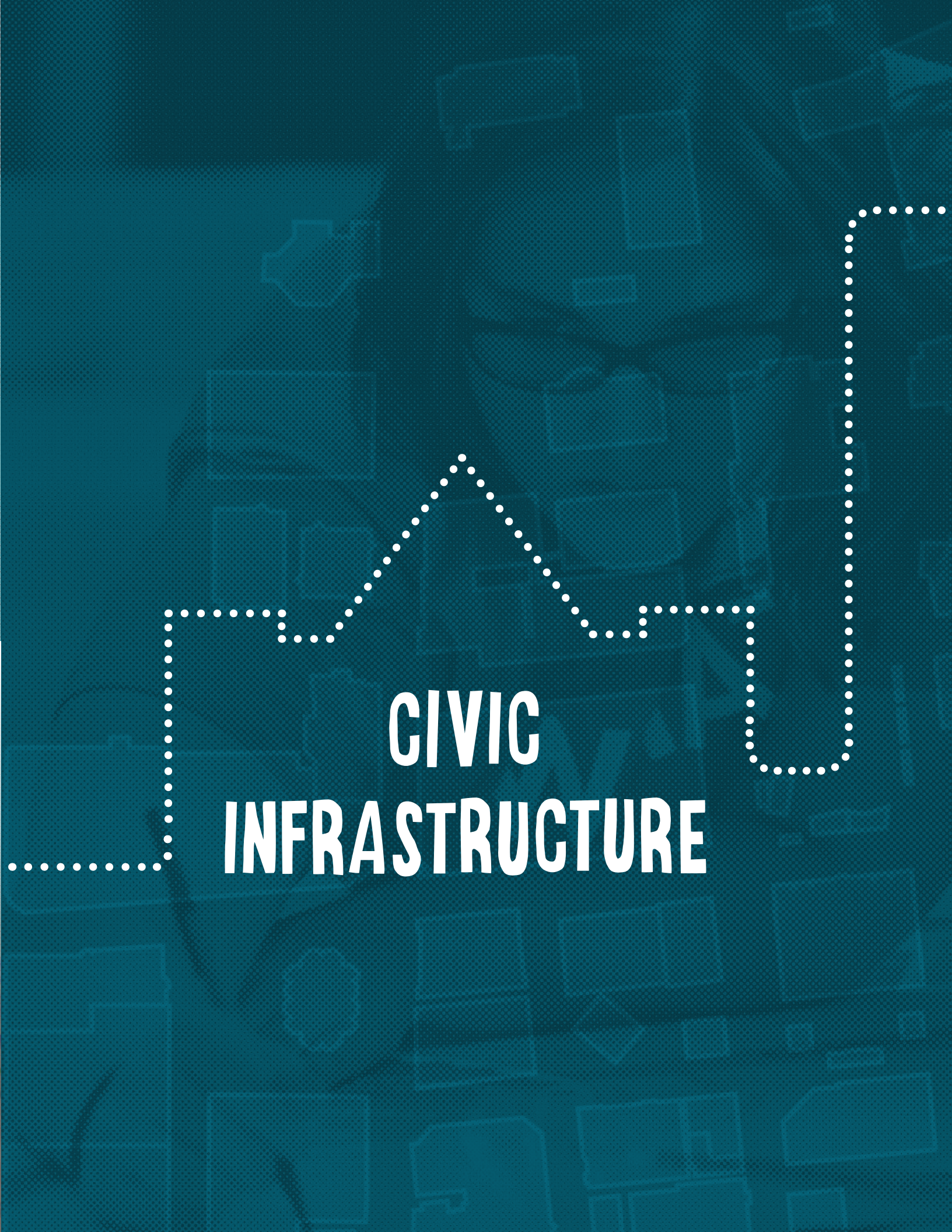
- citizen-driven land-use planning exercises in India;
- local health councils in Brazil, ward committees in South Africa; and
- co-production in the Philippines.

These more sustained forms of engagement seem to have strong impacts on equity, government efficiency, and trust. When participants have increased trust in public institutions, public expenditures are more likely to benefit low-income people and poverty is reduced. The next section, Civic Infrastructure, describes the practice, culture, and structure to support long-term engagement.

DID YOU KNOW?

The City of Edmonton is one of the few municipalities in Canada that has used citizen deliberation to support policy decisions. Since 2009, in partnership with the Centre for Public Involvement (CPI), the City has piloted three Citizens' Panels and one Citizens' Jury to involve a broad diversity of people in deliberation on key city issues. These were "random-sample" processes that engaged 50-60 people in each Citizens' Panel, and 16 in the Citizen Jury.




CIVIC
INFRASTRUCTURE

A. PUTTING ENGAGEMENT INTO PRACTICE

The previous sections highlighted the benefits of acknowledging that citizens are competent and commited adults. Of course, not all engagement looks alike. Engagement can occur in many different contexts and happen in many different ways.

There are three main kinds of public engagement activities – thick, thin, and conventional – each uses a wide variety of processes and activities that share common features.

1. Thick Engagement

Thick engagement enables large numbers of people to work together. First they work in small groups (usually 5-15 per group) and then often come together in a larger group to learn, decide, and act. Generally speaking, it is the most meaningful and powerful of the three forms of engagement, but also the most intensive and time-consuming, and the least common.

There is great variety among thick engagement processes (see box), but perhaps the most significant commonality is the idea of empowering the small group. These processes encourage people to work out what they think about a topic. They then decide what they want to do, in conversation with other participants.

Thick Engagement Strategies

The best thick engagement projects rely on a number of tactics:

• *Proactive, network-based recruitment* that attracts large, diverse numbers of people. Organizers map the different kinds of networks that residents belong to, and reach out to Community Connectors who can reach out to these networks. These are people they already know and trust.

The small group facilitation helps each group set ground rules for their discussion and use the time and materials they have been given. Facilitation is often done by trained volunteers rather than issue experts or professionals. The main goal of the facilitator is to help guide the discussions by ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to speak and follows the ground rules. Strategies also include:

• *A discussion sequence* that takes participants from sharing experiences, to considering views and policy choices, to planning for action.

The first step in this sequence creates understanding and empathy, the second informs and establishes common ground, and the third helps participants define goals and actions.

• *Issue framing* that describes the main views or policy options on the issue or decision being addressed in ways that resonate for the public.

• *An action strategy* that helps participants, public officials, and other decision-makers capitalize on the input and energy generated through the process.

This work is accomplished in different ways. In some cases, it resembles a volunteer fair, where local organizations help participants connect with specific service opportunities. In other cases, it focuses on fundraising and ensuring that ideas and projects have the in-kind support and financial capital they need to move forward. In still others, it looks more like an advocacy campaign, with participants and public officials working on policy proposals and reaching out to other citizens and officials who are neutral or opposed.

Serious Games

An underappreciated type of thick engagement includes“serious games” that simulate real-world events to educate users and sometimes solve problems. Although a serious game may be entertaining, it is also designed to explore and communicate about issues like education, health, and public policy. Serious games are sometimes used as discrete exercises within thick engagement processes. Others are processes in themselves, and include large numbers of people in deliberation, role-playing, and competition.

THICK ENGAGEMENT: What's In A Name?

Some of the processes for small-group discussion featured in thick engagement processes have official names. A few have even been trademarked. Many other processes use a more generic name for these discussions, such as "community conversations," and "community dialogues," and others don't use a name at all. Sometimes, the project itself has a title – for example, "Decatur Next," "Chapel Hill 2020," or "Portsmouth Listens" – but not always.

Furthermore, the names tend to describe only the "inside the room" dynamics of these processes, rather than the "outside the room" factors that are so critical to their success.

• Appreciative Inquiry • Citizen Assemblies • Citizen Juries
• Open Space • Participatory Budgeting • Citizen Panels

Online Platforms and Tools for Thick Engagement:

• Dialogue-App • EngagementHQ • MetroQuest
• Planning Charrettes • Serious Games • Study Circles
• Sustained Dialogue • World Café • Zilino
• Common Ground for Action • Choicebook

Citizens' Panels

The City of Edmonton is one of the few municipalities in Canada that has used citizen deliberation in support of policy decisions. Since 2009, in partnership with CPI, the City has piloted three Citizens' Panels and one Citizens' Jury to involve a broad diversity of people in deliberation on key city issues. However, these were "random sample" processes that engaged 50-60 people in each Citizens' Panel, and 16 in the Citizen Jury. In other communities, this level of participation, though diverse, has had limited policy impacts. Furthermore, these processes aren't designed to achieve some of the other potential benefits of treating citizens like adults, such as encouraging citizen action or advancing learning across the community. Examples like the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly and the Oregon Citizens' Initiative Review suggest that random sample processes can have a greater impact on policy if they are used in concert with a large-scale communication effort that broadcasts the outcomes of the deliberation to the larger population. To take stock of the practice of engagement in Edmonton, we should identify the strengths of these random sample processes, decide when they should be used, and think through how to magnify their strengths and compensate for their shortcomings.

Citizens' Panels and reference panels connected to policy making are examples of thick public engagement collaborations with the intention of informing policy. The Edmonton Citizens' Panel, an example shared in this report, was a partnership between CPI, Alberta Climate Dialogue (ABCD), and the City of Edmonton. The panel directly connected with the City of Edmonton's commitment that they would seriously consider their recommendations in developing an Energy Transition Plan and support implementation of the City of Edmonton's *Way We Green.*

Examples of Thick Engagement:

CITIZENS' PANEL ON EDMONTON'S ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHALLENGES

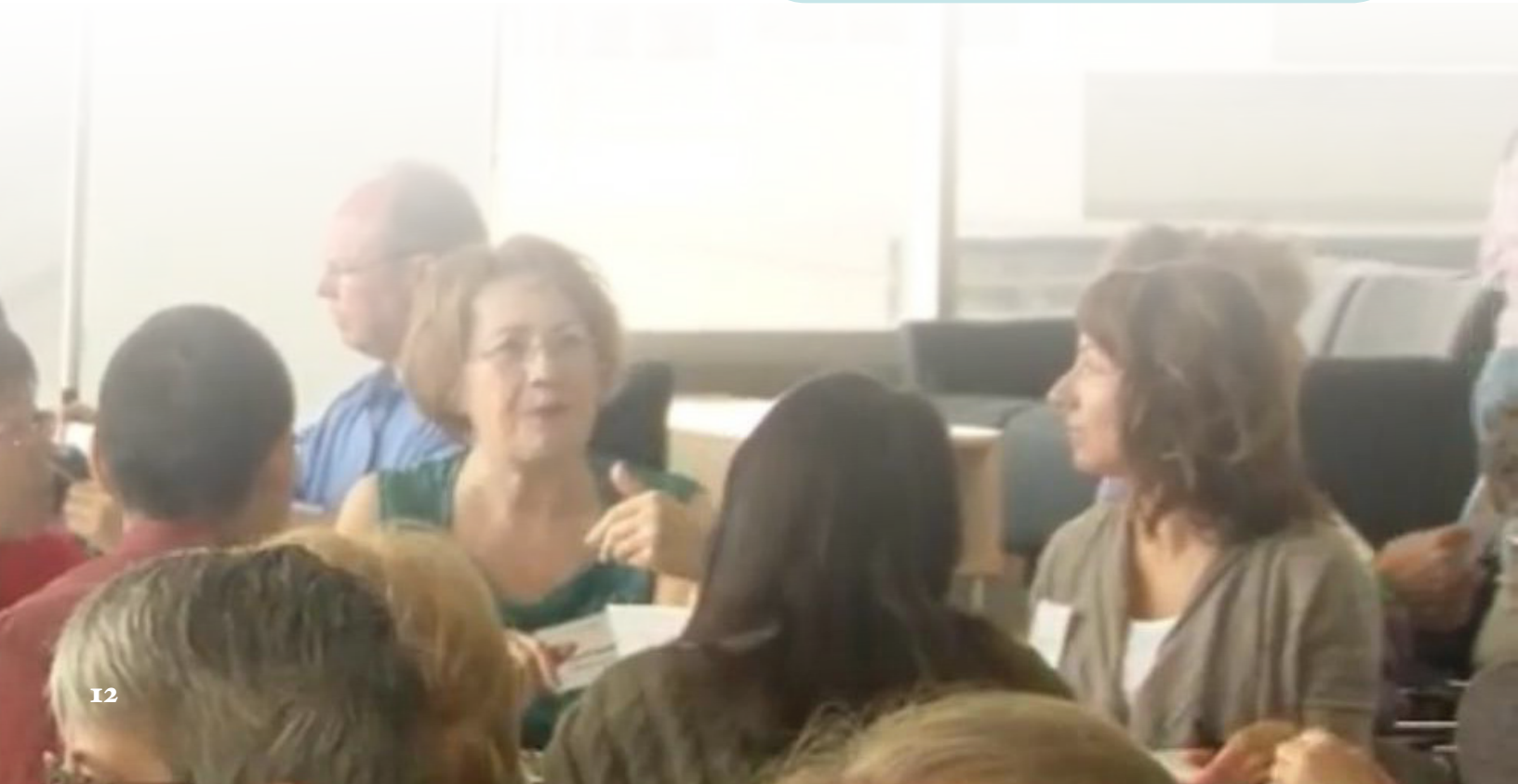
In 2012, fifty-six diverse citizens from Edmonton participated in a Citizens' Panel on Edmonton's Energy and Climate Challenges. Participants learned about climate change and energy vulnerability from balanced materials and presentations by experts. The Citizens' Panel members came together at the invitation of the City to make recommendations to Administration and Council, with the City's commitment that they would seriously consider their recommendations in developing an energy transition plan. The Panelists worked together over six day-long sessions, and developed a final report with their recommendations for the City of Edmonton. This full report and all materials are online at City of Edmonton.

edmonton.ca/programs_services/environmental/citizens-panel-energy-climate

THE BRITISH COLUMBIA CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON ELECTORAL REFORM

In 2011, Vitalizing Democracy developed a case study of British Columbia's Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. The Citizens' Assembly in Electoral Reform was a body created by the government of British Columbia, Canada in 2004. The Citizens' Assembly investigated and recommended changes to improve the electoral system of the province. 160 citizens, selected at random from throughout the province, met every other weekend for one year to deliberate about alternative voting arrangements. The Citizens' Assembly recommended that the province's First Past the Post (FPTP) system be replaced by a Single Transferable Vote (STV) system. Although the recommendation was ultimately defeated with 62 percent of voters opposing the change, this case study demonstrates that despite the outcome, ordinary citizens have the capacity to be engaged in civic and political processes.

participedia.net/en/cases/british-columbia-citizens-assembly-electoral-reform



2. Thin Engagement

Thin engagement activates people as individuals rather than in groups. Before the Internet, signing petitions and filling out surveys were probably the most common kinds of thin engagement. Now, just by sending a text or clicking a link, a citizen can sign an e-petition, 'like' a cause on Facebook, retweet an opinion, or rank ideas in a crowdsourcing exercise. In just a few minutes, people can contribute to maps and documents, donate money to a project, or give feedback on public problems and services.

While they participate as individuals, people who take advantage of these opportunities are often motivated by feeling a part of a larger movement or cause. When sufficient numbers of people are involved, thin engagement can have real impact. These activities occasionally 'go viral' through the vast networking power of the Internet, attracting huge numbers of people and mass media attention. Although it would be easy to recast the thick-thin distinction as face-to-face vs online engagement, that would too be too simplistic. Some face-to-face engagement can be fast, convenient, and thin, while some online engagement is quite thick and intensive. Some of the best examples of thick engagement use online tools to inform and complement face-to-face processes.

What unites these thin engagement activities? Individuals are provided with opportunities to express their ideas, opinions, or concerns, in a way that requires only a few moments of their time. Thin engagement opportunities that take place online can spread more rapidly than their thick counterparts. However, in most cases they still require the same kind of proactive, network-based recruitment to attract a large, diverse critical mass of people.

VARIETIES OF THIN ENGAGEMENT

There are many varieties of thin engagement, including some that are applied with face-to-face or telephone activities, and others that use online or mobile phone applications.

Face-to-Face or Telephone Activities for Thin Engagement:

• Surveys • Petitions • Polls • Open Houses

• Booths at Fairs and Festivals • Telephone hotlines (e.g, "311")

The variety of digital activities is rapidly expanding. Some of the digital tools blur the lines between thick and thin engagement. Some involve the user much more in the activity. In others, the activity is connected fairly seamlessly with more intensive engagement opportunities. Some platforms, apps, and processes for digital thin engagement are trademarked as proprietary technologies by nonprofit organizations or for-profit companies. There is a great deal of turnover with platforms and organizations emerging and disappearing.

ONLINE AND DIGITAL APPLICATIONS FOR THIN ENGAGEMENT

General Purpose	Examples
CROWDSOURCING AND IDEATION	MindMixer; IdeaScale; OpenTownHall; SpigitEngage, Peak Democracy, Ideaforum
DATA GATHERING AND FEEDBACK ON PUBLIC PROBLEMS AND SERVICES	SeeClickFix; FixMyStreet; PublicStuff; Waze; NoiseTube
CROWDFUNDING	Citizinvestor; Neighborly; Kickstarter
PETITIONS	Change.org
GAMES	Community PlanIt; City Creator; Super City
MAPPING AND WIKIS	LocalWiki; Wikiplanning; MapIt; Mapumental; OpenStreetMap
INDICATING PREFERENCES ON SOCIAL MEDIA	Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn

Edmonton Insight Community

Edmonton is one of the first municipalities in Canada to launch an online citizen panel with over 2,000 members in 2015. The Insight Community is a growing group of diverse Edmontonians who provide feedback on City policies, initiatives and community issues. Community members are invited to complete surveys on a wide range of topics at least once a month. Some surveys have questions on one project, while other surveys have questions on multiple topics. Members of the community complete surveys at their convenience and on the topics they care about.

This is a thin form of participation because:

1. It doesn't require a great deal of time or energy from citizens, and

2. Residents engage as individuals rather than having to work things through with other people.

An online panel can provide a relatively easy and convenient way for public officials and city staff to get a sense of what citizens think. But while they involve larger numbers of people, these panels typically do not help communities address conflicts, facilitate learning, or generate citizen action.

The City of Edmonton online 311 service provides residents with information on public services. These kinds of systems are used in many North American cities, and seem to be popular with citizens. Some cities have gone further by using platforms like SeeClickFix that allow citizens to identify particular problems for local government to fix. And some have gone even further by experimenting with platforms like PublicStuff and HeartGov, which are intended to help inspire and coordinate citizen (not just government) problem-solving. The next section highlights conventional forms of engagement.

3. Conventional Engagement

Conventional engagement processes are older forms of engagement that were developed to uphold order, accountability, and transparency. If thick and thin engagement opportunities are designed to empower citizens (in different ways), conventional engagement is intended mainly to provide citizens with checks on government power or solicit input, but they do not typically deepen dialogue.

Conventional engagement is the most common of the three forms of engagement. It is part of most public institutions. Accordingly, official engagement is almost always conventional engagement. Official, however, does not just mean governmental. Even in informal settings, like neighbourhood associations and parent-teacher organizations, the participants often use Robert's Rules of Order and other forms of conventional engagement.

Conventional engagement describes most of the meetings or hearings held by public bodies such as school boards and city councils.

Conventional processes generally rely on a number of common procedures:

- *Advance notification:* announcement on a government website or in the local newspaper
- *An audience-style room setup:* decision-makers behind a table, citizens in chairs in rows
- *A preset agenda:* strictly followed; issues not on the agenda cannot be raised
- *Public comment segments:* citizens address officials at an open microphone

It would be easy to say that conventional engagement is "bad" – and that because these processes are most often administered by government, that all official engagement is not effective. However, many public officials and employees have led, organized, or supported better forms of public engagement (both thick and thin). The role of government does not have to be limited to official engagement – and official engagement does not necessarily have to be ineffective. Nevertheless, both citizens and public officials tend be frustrated by the limits of conventional engagement.

SUMMARY OF THICK, THIN AND CONVENTIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Way in which engagement treats people like capable, committed citizens	Thick	Thin	Conventional
PROVIDING INFORMATION – AS MUCH AS PEOPLE WANT	yes	sometimes	sometimes
GIVING PEOPLE A CHANCE TO TELL THEIR STORIES	yes	sometimes	no
PRESENTING A RANGE OF POLICY CHOICES	yes	sometimes	no
GIVING CITIZENS A SENSE OF POLITICAL LEGITIMACY	yes	sometimes	no
SUPPORTING PEOPLE TO TAKE ACTION IN A VARIETY OF WAYS	yes	sometimes	no
USING SOUND GROUP PROCESS TECHNIQUES	yes	no	no
MAKING PARTICIPATION ENJOYABLE	sometimes	sometimes	no
MAKING PARTICIPATION EASY AND CONVENIENT	no	yes	no

This chart demonstrates how thick, thin and conventional forms of engagement are valuable in different ways.

SHORTCOMINGS OF THICK AND THIN ENGAGEMENT

The newer forms of engagement, both thick and thin, are generally superior to conventional forms. Many were developed to compensate for the failures of conventional engagement. However, thick and thin engagement practices also have their shortcomings. Thin civic innovations often have limited impact because they are **isolated products** that are seldom incorporated into any larger engagement plan or system. Thick civic innovations tend to be **temporary processes**, and they too are seldom incorporated into any larger engagement plan or system. For every thick or thin engagement opportunity, participants have to be recruited – and since recruitment is typically a time-intensive task, temporary engagement is a difficult, **inefficient** way to do things.

SHORTCOMINGS OF CONVENTIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Given the attributes of "good" participation, it is easy to see why conventional processes do not measure up. As the "Summary of Thick, Thin and Conventional Engagement" chart demonstrates, it is important to assess each form of participation – thick, thin, and conventional – in terms of treating citizens like adults.

Thick participation generally features many of the attributes of a **collaborative** relationship, though it is not easy and convenient. Thin participation is easy and convenient, and sometimes features the attributes of a **reciprocal** relationship. Conventional participation offers few of the attributes of a relationship that treats citizens as capable and committed participants, and in most cases is not particularly easy or convenient.

B. CULTURE OF ENGAGEMENT

The second aspect of engagement infrastructure to consider is the culture for strengthening engagement. This civic culture includes the people and supportive spaces for assembly and effective engagement. This culture of engagement fosters broad and diverse participation and sustains engagement.

Productive engagement practices can accomplish a great deal. But they also require time and resources from both citizens and public servants. A big challenge is recruitment. Recruiting large, diverse numbers of people is one of the most challenging and time-consuming tasks. What other ways can we use to find and support spaces where people are already assembled, or create and sustain spaces where people will remain engaged? In other words, how can we make engagement practices more efficient and effective by strengthening the ***culture*** of engagement?

Four kinds of civic assets seem to be particularly important to build a supportive culture for engagement:

1. Neighbourhood associations,
2. Hyperlocal online forums,
3. Organizations working with recent immigrants or Aboriginal groups, and
4. Youth councils.

Neighbourhood associations and councils have been around for decades (though in many cases they need to be updated and improved). Other assets are relatively new innovations. Some of these assets include:

1. Neighbourhood associations and councils vary dramatically from place to place, but most are voluntary groups of residents trying to improve or preserve the quality of life in their neighbourhood. Neighbourhood associations organize social activities, conduct street and park clean- ups, coordinate playground-building, tree planting and other improvement projects, and advocate on behalf of neighbourhood residents in city-level policy making arenas. Neighbourhood councils perform similar functions. However, they have a higher level of institutional legitimacy because local government gives them a formal role on certain decisions and policies. Many cities support neighbourhood groups by assigning planners, police officers, and other city employees to work directly with them.

A common problem with many neighbourhood associations and councils is that they operate like miniature city councils. They spend time electing leadership, holding conventional meetings, and failing to engage large, diverse numbers of neighbourhood residents. Many use time-consuming conventional meeting management techniques, such as Robert's Rules of Order. Consequently, neighbourhood groups are often dominated by small, passionate groups of volunteers, and many of these people 'burn out' quickly and move on to other interests. These groups may be more sustainable if they meet more often, incorporate online forums, and make their meetings more social and child-friendly.

The **Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues (EFCL)** provides assistance and support to community leagues. In 2014 an engagement review was conducted to identify challenges and key areas for successes, to strengthen how public engagement by and with leagues is happening in Edmonton. One of the results of this review is that the EFCL has a new strategic priority on

Edmonton has 157 community leagues that play a major role in fostering engagement in Edmonton neighbourhoods. Because they have staffing and an official role in government decision-making for their neighbourhood, community leagues are similar to neighbourhood councils in other cities.

diversity and inclusion. The goal is to broaden the range of people who are involved in leagues by removing some of the reasons they are not involved, such as barriers.

2. Hyperlocal online forums are one of the newest and fastest growing cultural engagement tools. These may be email listservs, Facebook groups, or forums promoted by for profit and nonprofit groups (such as e-democracy). These kinds of platforms have made it much easier to build and maintain interactive networks of people. They provide far greater levels of electoral power, financial resources, and collective problem-solving capacity. Neighbourhood and school-based online forums have spread dramatically. There is great potential for hyperlocal online forums in Edmonton to enhance public engagement.

One key to the growth of these online forums is that they allow people to meet their social needs, not just engage in political discussions. Online communication seems to make people more interested in meeting face-to-face. Members of these online forums also ask non-political questions like "Who has a plumber they can recommend?" "Has anyone seen my lost cat?" Or, "when is the neighbourhood barbecue?" People stay involved in these virtual spaces for many reasons:

- they are convenient;
- they allow for interaction,
- they deepen and complement face-to-face relationships,
- they are adaptable by the participants, and
- they give people a powerful sense of membership.

In other words, they combine some of the best features of thick and thin engagement.

Steve Clift of e-democracy.org recommends that anyone trying to start an online forum first gather 100 email addresses (see http://forums.e-democracy.org/support/newforum/). With that kind of critical mass, a forum can become self-sustaining without a great deal of effort from the moderator. The initial phase of recruiting those 100 participants, and ensuring that they have a positive experience, is critical.

3. Organizations working with recent immigrant, Métis, Inuit, and First Nations communities can be a critically important asset for establishing a culture of engagement. These organizations have experience helping integrate people into the community. They also help sustain the vibrant communities that already exist among these populations and help everyone understand and value what these communities have to offer.

Efforts to bring people together across cultural differences have had a strong impact on the best practices in public engagement today. Partnerships between recent immigrants and longtime residents have helped to highlight engagement on all kinds of issues, including racism, discrimination, and relations between Indigenous people. Broad groups of citizens emphasize the importance of giving people a chance to share their stories and experiences. Successful engagement processes use lessons learned from citizens. These experiences have reinforced the value of impartial facilitators. They have demonstrated how network-based recruitment could bring in people from populations that were previously considered "hard to reach." They have also established that many citizens wanted to plan for action in addition to taking part in dialogue.

As cultural assets for engagement, organizations serving recent immigrants or First Nations, Métis and Inuit people have some of the same strengths and challenges as neighbourhood groups. In particular, they sometimes struggle to attract and sustain the involvement of young people. The next section on Youth Councils describes structures that support partnerships with youth.

THE CITY OF EDMONTON'S ABORIGINAL RELATIONS OFFICE (ARO)

The City of Edmonton's Aboriginal Relations Office (ARO) is a place where Aboriginal people and organizations can connect to the appropriate City of Edmonton department, and access City of Edmonton programs and services.

The Aboriginal Relations Office works to:

- Build and support good relations between the City of Edmonton, Aboriginal people and organizations that serve Aboriginal people.
- Increase Aboriginal participation in the City of Edmonton workforce.
- Ensure City-mandated services address the needs of Aboriginal people.
- Coordinate City participation in Aboriginal community-led initiatives.
- Help the City of Edmonton fulfill the intentions of City Council's Aboriginal Declaration
- Provide leadership and support in the renewal of the Accord.
- Provide support to the Edmonton Urban Aboriginal Affairs Committee

The Aboriginal Relations Office provides information about Edmonton's urban Aboriginal residents, and gathers information to support and influence organizations' and community decisions that affect the Aboriginal community in Edmonton and surrounding area.

Read more at www.edmonton.ca/city_government/city_organization/aboriginal-relations-office.aspx

4. Youth councils are advisory bodies that provide input to city councils and other groups, mainly on issues that are important to young people but outside the school system. They are also intended to make a powerful statement to all young people and adult residents that youth are full and valued members of the community. Most youth councils are relatively small and engage only a handful of students. A few, however, are linked to student governments and many other kinds of student groups. Those youth councils serve as hubs for much broader systems of youth engagement.

Edmonton has key structures in place to support public engagement in partnership with youth. **Edmonton's NextGen** is a group of young, passionate, community-minded individuals who are contributing to Edmonton. Edmonton also has a **Youth Council** that has a mandate to provide information and advice to Council in relation to issues involving or affecting young people. So far, a relatively small number of young people have been involved in these projects, and the most active and academically successful students seem to be over-represented. However, a wide array of young people, including many from low-income families, are starting to show an interest in civic engagement.

An ongoing challenge is to work with youth organizations to consider who they attract, and how young people are engaged. For example:

- **Do they attract only the most out-going young people?**
- **Who is able to participate and who is excluded?**
- **How many people are engaged?**
- **Have they had an impact on public policy?**

Like their counterparts in other places, leaders in NextGen and the Edmonton Youth Council are exploring ways to expand their reach to involve more of the city's youth. To attract a more diverse group of young people, think about other youth networks and how or in what ways they develop leadership skills.

C. STRUCTURE

The third aspect of engagement to consider is the structure for supporting engagement. This consists of ***laws, metrics, institutions, governmental bodies, training programs, and professional incentives that can support it.*** A number of potential structural reforms to consider are described below.

Local engagement ordinances are an example of a structure to support public engagement. Most of the laws governing public participation are at least thirty years old. Because these laws predate not only many of the innovations in face-to-face engagement, but also the Internet itself, it is unclear how they apply to:

- Social media platforms used by public officials and public employees.
- Participation by public officials and public employees in neighbourhood online forums, email listservs, and other online arenas.
- Participation by public officials and public employees in small-group dialogue and deliberation as part of larger public engagement efforts.
- Online tools to announce and proactively recruit for public meetings
- Collaboration between public institutions and private, nonprofit, charitable, and faith-based institutions in organizing and supporting public participation.

Our laws ought to uphold the values of participation, transparency, privacy, inclusion, fairness, and freedom of speech. But in many cases, it is now difficult to decipher the intent of the law. The City of Edmonton Open City Initiative provides an example of a structure for engagement.

The City of Edmonton Open City Initiative

The City of Edmonton has an Open City Initiative and passed an **Open City Policy** in 2015. As an Open City, the City of Edmonton will create opportunities for diverse input and participation, by inviting Edmontonians to play a larger role in shaping the community and enabling social and economic growth. The City of Edmonton Open Policy emphasizes the value of greater transparency and accountability, and increased citizen engagement.

OPEN CITY INITIATIVE & POLICY

The City of Edmonton Open City Initiative has 5 core goals, and it is based on these principles.

An Open City Edmonton is:

Transparent – the City's information is a public asset.
Participatory – The City believes that a democracy values and respects public input and engages people in decision making.
Collaborative – Edmontononians, non-profit organizations, businesses and the community are engaged to design and deliver integrated and effective programs.
Inclusive – access to information, services, and processes is increased, and barriers are addressed.
Innovative – The City envisions, creates and fosters new approaches, and efficient and sustained practices.

edmonton.ca/city_government/initiatives_innovation/open-city

PROFILE ON PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING: TORONTO COMMUNITY HOUSING

For more than a decade, the Toronto Community Housing residents have used a Participatory Budgeting process to decide how to spend capital funds to improve their communities *(http://www.torontohousing.com/pb)*. In 2014, the total PB budget for all buildings and developments was $5 million.

The process:

1) Residents plan their own meetings and decide which projects are needed in their community;
2) Residents get information about past repairs, as well as a list of capital projects planned for their community;
3) Final decisions are made about the allocation meeting;
4) One delegate and one alternate per development reviews all priorities and vote for the ones that get funded. Residents choose one priority per building.

Want to learn more about Participatory Budgeting?

www.participatorybudgeting.org/about-participatory-budgeting/what-is-pb/

PB demonstrates the inclusive, citizen-led process of deciding how to allocate resources. After determining priorities based on evidence of current needs, community members and area residents decide on priority projects and spending.

Participatory Budgeting

Participatory Budgeting (PB) strengthens community engagement and democratic decision-making.

There are benefits and limitations to Participatory Budgeting. The benefits are substantial - to encourage greater public engagement in the future, bring community members together to set priorities, and use allocated funds from the public budget to support changes in neighbourhoods. Despite the benefits, Participatory Budgeting often has a short timeline from start to finish, and requires facilitation.

One reason why there is more sustained participation in some countries, for example, in the Global South may be that they have newer constitutions and a more open-minded approach to the legal framework for participation. Participatory Budgeting in Brazil has made productive participation a legally accepted and supported part of politics. It typically involves citizens in a four-stage process:

1. Ideas are generated within defined communities
2. The best of those ideas are turned into detailed, well-researched proposals which are then assessed for feasibility and cost
3. The remaining projects are voted on by the community
4. The projects are implemented by a municipality or ward (or another sponsoring entity — usually depending on its source of funding — such as community housing authorities, schools, universities, charities, etc.)

Engagement commissions can advise a community on the design, use, and evaluation of public engagement processes. They also build and support sustainable engagement processes. Some commissions are official groups created by local governments. They may also be independent groups such as foundations, school systems, Chambers of Commerce, and interfaith councils and faith institutions.

A commission or board could have one or more of the following responsibilities:

1. Develop and propose a multi-year plan for public engagement to guide public engagement activities, programs, and policies.
2. Develop guidelines and recommendations for inclusive, effective public engagement.
3. Provide advice and recommendations regarding the implementation of public engagement guidelines and practices.
4. Establish engagement measures, publicize and review the results, and help people use the results to improve engagement policies and practices.
5. Provide an annual report regarding the status of public engagement activities.

A public engagement commission or board must ensure representation from across the city. It should adopt its own rules and bylaws, using successful engagement practices and including ways for larger numbers of citizens to contribute to the work of the commission.

One way for engagement commissions to connect people working in different neighbourhoods, communities, and issue areas is to hold a large-scale deliberative process every year. This expectation could be written into a local engagement law, or it could be part of a long-term engagement plan of a range of local institutions. The following two examples demonstrate these structures.

Engaged City Task Force

The City of Vancouver has established an Engaged City Task Force to increase neighbourhood engagement and improve the ways the City connects with residents.

Public Involvement Advisory Council

The City of Portland has a Public Involvement Advisory Council (PIAC), created by City Council to develop guidelines and policy recommendations for citywide public involvement and to encourage ongoing collaboration between the community, City bureaus and City Council.

www.portlandoregon.gov/oni/48951

City of Edmonton

CIVIC SPACES

In Edmonton, The Centre for Public Involvement partnered with the Edmonton Multicultural Coalition on a pilot project called "Civic Spaces." This project supported the civic and political engagement of immigrants and refugees in Edmonton. Civics 101 educational workshops provided participants with the tools and opportunities to understand government in Canada on municipal, provincial and federal levels. This workshop was also designed to increase the knowledge of participants to be involved in elections and civic life. Participants identified key issues, and met candidates in the 2013 Edmonton General Election and other members in their ward.

centreforpublicinvolvement.com/work/archives/2013/09/26/edmonton-multicultural-coalition-pilot-project/

CITIZENS' ACADEMIES & OTHER CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMS

Citizens' academies and other training programs can help build up the local "skill base" needed to support engagement. In some places, the skills are there but so spread throughout the community that it isn't easy to find the people who could be helpful. Within City Hall, these skills are sometimes limited to a small group of public employees working out of departments for neighbourhood services or human relations.

PLANNING ACADEMY

The City of Edmonton has developed a Planning Academy to help citizens understand and participate in the planning process. Participants will also better understand the roles, rights and interests of all parties involved in the planning and development process. The Planning branch of Sustainable Development offers a series of 3 courses with an instruction manual and instruction. Sessions include discussions and "real life" activities to increase participants' understanding of topics such as Land Use Planning, Urban Design, and Transportation. Participants can earn a 'Certificate of Participation' by completing the three core courses and one elective course.

edmonton.ca/city_government/urban_planning_and_design/planning-academy

CIVICS IN THE CITY

The City of Edmonton Office of the City Clerk provides a number of civic learning initiatives for citizens, including youth and children. In the fall of 2014, the City Clerk's Office initiated two new workshops: 1) Understanding City Hall, takes members of the public through the Council decision-making journey; 2) City Hall High, a program with high school students, provides experiential learning about municipal government and democracy.

City Hall School is another site of civic learning where elementary students come to City Hall for hands-on, inquiry based learning. Students interact with Councillors and City staff to gain an understanding of municipal government and their City.

edmonton.ca/city_government/city_organization/office-of-the-city-clerk.aspx

CIVICS 101 TORONTO

Civics 101 Toronto is a civic literacy pilot developed to educate Torontonians about how the City government works: their role in local government, how decisions are made, planning, finances and elections. In 2009, the program was just one component of the City Manager's Strategic and Corporate Policy Division's Civic Engagement strategy. Toronto Civics 101 sessions cover the basics of City government (6 sessions over 3 months). Participants learn to consider the information and issues important in making decisions about programs, services and budgeting to best meet the needs of citizens. See the website to explore the learning guides and read the report on this initiative.

www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=25e1acb-640c21410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD

CITYSTUDIO VANCOUVER

In this 'innovation hub' inside City Hall, staff, university students and community members co-create, design and run projects. The goal of CityStudio is to experiment with the ways cities are co-created. CityStudio teaches students the skills needed to collaborate on real projects in Vancouver with City staff and community stakeholders. CityStudio brings together stakeholders, defines problems and creates solutions while improving student skills and keeping talent in the city. They aim to create a culture change at City Hall and demonstrate future possibilities.

citystudiovancouver.com

OTTAWA CITIZEN ACADEMY

This volunteer-run organization fosters discussion and civic education as a foundation for meaningful and constructive engagement, interaction and action. CA is interested in "city building" – with fun and passion. CA offers safe places for citizens to learn about issues that affect them, their neighbourhood and their city. CA provides a space to share resources and ideas that inspires participants and gives them access to information, opportunities for learning, and best practices from other places. A 5-week Civics Boot Camp, covers municipal governance, budgeting and land use planning, and applied projects. Small groups plan civic action and make their pitch to a panel of community leaders who provide feedback on the plans. See website for resources for civic engagement, diversity and inclusion, and dialogue.

citizensacademy.ca

Limitations of Citizen Capacity Building Programs

Many citizens' academies are limited to informing participants about "how government works" – for example, how to apply for a zoning variance, or how the police department deploys officers. These may be important facts for citizens to know, but they are insufficient for supporting robust public engagement.

These capacity building programs have potential for developing skills and supports needed for a sustainable engagement infrastructure and civic leadership. Specifically, learning programs could be used to inform citizens about why engagement is important, to discuss issue areas where engagement could be useful, and develop skills that are necessary for improving engagement in practice.

Civic Engagement training programs will work best when:

- They are provided as part of an ongoing program that can train large numbers of people over time.
- Participants are recruited proactively, with a special emphasis on reaching segments of the community that have been marginalized or under-represented.
- The curricula and content are publicly available online and in the different languages spoken in the community.
- They help prepare and recruit citizens for membership on public commissions and advisory boards.
- Citizens, public officials, and public employees take part in the trainings together (sometimes as trainers, sometimes as trainees) so that they learn the same skills and build relationships with the other participants.

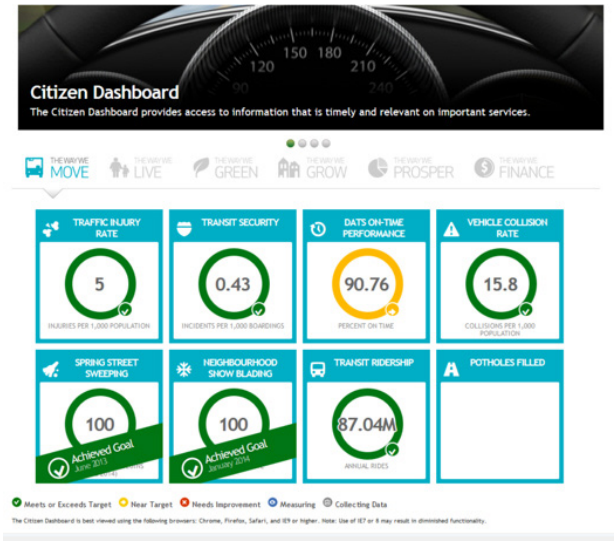
Online Citizen Dashboards

Online engagement dashboards can also be effective supports for engagement infrastructure. They can be used to track data like turnout, demographics, and participant satisfaction, and to make that information publicly available online. In doing so, dashboards can help organizers and participants measure the quality of engagement efforts and decide how to improve them.

The City of Edmonton Citizen Dashboard allows viewers to see "real-time data" that demonstrates how well the City performs in providing municipal services and response times, such as development permits, traffic safety rates, and waste recycling. The Citizen Dashboard was created for the City of Edmonton to be accountable, open and transparent about its municipal services, and to build public confidence in the daily work of the City. In 2014, the City won a prestigious national public-sector leadership award— recognition from municipal-administrator colleagues across Canada that the City of Edmonton is a leader in open data.

Like other examples across North America, the Edmonton dashboard does not measure engagement itself. There are a few examples that take some of the 'meta-data' about citizen engagement, such as rates of voting and volunteerism, and track them over time. Although these kinds of dashboards are valuable and revealing, they would be improved if they allowed communities to track finer-grained data about particular engagement efforts.

dashboard.edmonton.ca



One of the biggest challenges to evaluating public engagement efforts is gathering the data (eg. on measures like turnout). By following the approach and using some of the technological tools inherent in online platforms, communities can tap the capacity of citizens to contribute. "An online platform to evaluate public engagement can provide benefits to all the involved parties by lowering the costs of data collection and data sharing."

Mariana Becerril-Chavez, Katharyn Lindemann, Jack Mayernik, and Joe Ralbovsky (2012: 23).

Changes Within City Hall to Support Engagement

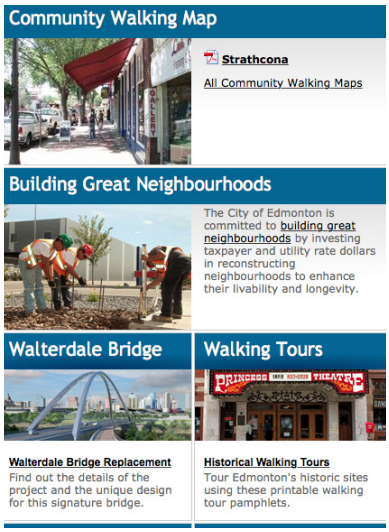
This is the final category of potential structural reform. One example is to provide direct professional incentives: success in public participation can be incorporated into the formula for pay raises, promotions, and other modes of professional advancement for many kinds of public employees, including planners, educators, health practitioners, and law enforcement personnel. This change would require citizens and public officials to define engagement, identify the particular kinds of engagement that are important to each job position, and have ways to measure the quantity and quality of that engagement.

Of course, the local engagement infrastructure could also feature practitioners who are employed by neighbourhood organizations, corporations, universities, school systems, and other institutions. For these positions, definitions and measures of participation could also be incorporated into the professional incentive structure.

Many engagement leaders will come from non-governmental (and often non-"official") organizations, and they need incentives for their work. A number of non-monetary incentives, such as recognition, awards, and forms of authority and legitimacy, can be devised to inspire these leaders.

Collaboration and Communication Between City Departments and Citizens

Finally, there is some evidence that working effectively with citizens requires a greater degree of collaboration between city departments. To help foster this kind of collaboration, the City of Edmonton has developed a **Great Neighbourhoods program**. Among other things, this initiative gets city employees working closely with residents, coordinating City services, and improving collaboration with other organizations and City departments to deliver services in neighbourhoods more efficiently.



This example shows how online resources connect citizens to services and their neighbourhoods.

Value and Recognize Excellence in Engagement

As highlighted in the introduction to this report, a Public Engagement Award is a way that the City of Edmonton can value and recognize excellence in engagement. The City of Edmonton can create annual engagement awards to recognize excellence in engagement—for individuals, community groups, and businesses. The criteria can be based on international standards of excellence, and criteria 'home grown' in Edmonton. Despite limitations, there is immense potential for civic learning. The following section describes how to pull all of these pieces together - *practice, culture and structure* - to strengthen engagement.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

A. ENVISIONING A BETTER ENGAGEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE

Grand plans are made of small elements. Like arranging puzzle pieces on a table, identifying potential building blocks and systemic supports makes it possible to envision how engagement infrastructure might actually look and work. Many different and complementary visions are possible at all levels of government.

There are five ways to aid this process:

- making it clear that engagement is a cross-sector priority;
- using plainer, more inspiring language; encouraging both progressive and conservative visions of and prescriptions for engagement;
- providing visual aids, like charts and maps; and
- encouraging artistic expressions of future forms of democracy.

Making it clear that engagement is a cross-sector priority is important because it acknowledges that many organizations and networks have a current or potential role in public engagement. One could develop long lists of extra-institutional allies with a stake in engagement on almost every issue, from public safety to public finance, to poverty.

It should be clear from these descriptions that public engagement is more than a governmental responsibility. A strong, healthy local democracy is something that benefits every community member, every organization, and every local leader. While City Hall plays a key role in improving and sustaining local democracy, it should not dictate the plan and it cannot bear the whole burden of implementing it.

It may be that community foundations, along with other non-profit groups that have a long-term stake in the community, are best positioned for planning supportive practices and structures for engagement. However, planning for stronger engagement infrastructure should be a cross-sector, collaborative endeavor.

Using plainer, more compelling language is essential. "Engagement infrastructure" is a starting place to think about engagement as an integrated system. The term "public engagement" is often used interchangeably with many other civic synonyms, such as public participation, democratic governance, citizen participation, participatory democracy, civic engagement, public involvement, citizen-centered work, public work, and public deliberation. These terms are unlikely to grab the attention of the average person, let alone serve as a rallying cry for change. Engagement leaders can use plainer, more compelling language to describe the potential features and benefits of a more participatory community. The "Civic Utopia" example shared in this report, developed by the Community Matters partnership convened by the Orton Family Foundation, is one example of how to do this.

Encouraging both progressive and conservative visions is crucial to ensure balance and inclusion. Engagement is often stereotyped as a "progressive" project, despite the fact that some of the most interesting innovations, such as the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly, shared in this report, came from the imaginations of right-of-center public officials. Language used to advance engagement is commonly associated with "liberal" or "left-leaning" terms and goals, such as equality (of voice and opportunity), concern for the disenfranchised, and appeals to consensus and community. Engagement can also be articulated in "conservative" or "right-leaning" terms and goals, such as nongovernmental action, local authority, and the power of citizens to control public decisions

and spending. Alberta has a strong history of community activism that could be characterized as populist and conservative in the sense of 'conserving communities'.

Both as an inspiring vision and as a practical plan, the need for stronger engagement infrastructure should be couched in both progressive and conservative ways. We should describe the challenge in ways that invite a broad response from all political parties and both sides of the ideological spectrum.

Using visual aids, like charts and maps can help supplement and clarify the language of engagement. Charts such as the "Spectrum of Public Engagement Activities" (www.nlc.org) produced by the Democratic Governance Panel of the National League of Cities could be adapted to show the range of participatory activities happening in a community.

A second way of providing visual aids is to map the activities taking place in a community. Interactive maps with a range of information about settings, vehicles, and hubs of engagement can be useful for citizens to see what is available, what is coming, and where there are gaps.

The following example illustrates how to imagine a vibrant, engaged community.

CIVIC UTOPIA: Combining Democratic Innovations To Create the Community We Want

A vision statement from the CommunityMatters Partnership

What is the future of civic engagement and local democracy? Two years ago, a set of organizations convened by the Orton Family Foundation (www.orton.org) began meeting around this question. All the groups were involved in helping communities engage citizens or build community, but in very different ways – from online engagement to face-to-face dialogue, from public deliberation to community development, from grantmaking to placemaking.

Through these conversations, the organizations realized that different perspectives and areas of expertise could be combined into a common, compelling vision about the kinds of communities people want. They formed the Community Matters Partnership to help communities work on their own visions:

- Imagine living in a neighbourhood that had inviting public spaces, indoors and outdoors, attracting all kinds of people.
- Imagine going to a city council, school board, or zoning meeting and spending most of the time in a small-group discussion where you got to learn, listen, talk – and feel like your views would contribute to policy decisions.
- Imagine living in a community with a steady supply of small grants available for teams of everyday people to work on local problems.
- Imagine living in a city where your ideas and projects were considered when shaping the city.
- Imagine being part of an online neighbourhood network you could tap into quickly and easily to ask questions like, "Who knows a good plumber they can recommend?," "Who has a canoe I can borrow?," "What is in the school system's redistricting plan?"
- Imagine being able to report public problems – from potholes and graffiti to low test scores at the grade school – that got the attention of public decision-makers, and that gave opportunities to help solve the problem.
- Imagine having an easily accessible map of your neighbourhood that showed new buildings being proposed, what zoning issues were on the horizon, and how to take part in those decisions.
- Imagine a school in which you and other parents met regularly with the teacher to discuss how things were going in the classroom.
- Imagine living in a community with a system of youth councils that gave students the chance to learn leadership skills for the future and exercise leadership in the present.

Encouraging artistic expressions of democracy is a final way to strengthen engagement. Envisioning a stronger engagement infrastructure, highlighted in this report, can be facilitated by tapping into citizens' creative impulses and encouraging more artistic expressions of how engagement might look. A fairly common practice in land use planning and visioning is to invite participants to take photographs or draw pictures of places in their community that they value or that need upgrading. This same approach can be used to more broadly imagine the possibilities for engagement infrastructure in communities.

Supporting organizational learning to strengthen engagement. Public officials and employees who see the merits of participation often lack the knowledge, skills, and abilities to launch effective and meaningful programs. Therefore, training and skill development is critical to upgrading our participation infrastructure. To help build their capacity, officials and administrators could take several steps, including: identifying a participation point of contact; supporting opportunities for training and continuing education; creating and sharing participation materials; creating platforms that collect and report examples and innovations in participation; and supporting communities of practice. These approaches can help government officials engage in peer-to-peer learning, share ideas and best practices, generate innovations, and sustain momentum. Centers such as Edmonton's Center for Public Involvement, and the Centre for Urban Pedagogy can play a vital role as hubs for research, training, and learning.

Edmonton's CITYlab

CITYlab is a collaborative planning unit within the City of Edmonton Sustainable Development department. CITYlab supports and creates small, temporary urban planning projects and activities to spark conversations.

This type of public engagement can help make urban planning and placemaking fun through projects that (re)imagine and improve shared spaces and get people talking about urban planning.
Placemaking includes projects that animate and colour shared spaces with things like pop-up cafes, street murals, parklets and other creative activities. CITYlab supports placemaking projects by:
• Putting urban planning policy into action with tangible on-the-ground activities,
• Connecting people to place and each other, and
• Learning through experimentation – it's a lab to try new things!

edmonton.ca/citylab

The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP)

The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP) is a nonprofit organization that uses design and art to improve civic engagement. CUP projects demystify urban policy and planning issues that impact communities, so that more individuals can participate in shaping them. The idea behind CUP is that increasing understanding of how these systems work is the first step to better and more diverse community participation. CUP projects are collaborations of art and design professionals, community-based advocates and policymakers, and staff. Together they take on complex issues—from the juvenile justice system to zoning law to food access—and break them down into simple, accessible, visual explanations. They create tools for organizers and educators all over New York City and beyond to help their constituents advocate for their own community needs.

welcometocup.org

B. PLANNING ENGAGEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE

Creating grand visions of how engagement infrastructure might look, and surveying the potential components of such an infrastructure, can be inspiring and daunting. Communities ought to embrace this challenge at regular intervals, in the same way that land-use comprehensive plans are devised and revised every few years. But if this is not possible, all is not lost. The fact is that most of the time, most of us do not have realistic chances to re-imagine how our communities should work – or, at least, we do not have realistic chances to implement those visions. It is much more likely that we can change how engagement works in the context of a single neighbourhood, a single school, or a single issue area (though we still need to contemplate and understand potential effects on the whole city and on other interconnected issues).

Although that kind of piecemeal approach may not be as inspiring, it is also not as daunting. Most infrastructures, whether they are physical—technological, or conceptual—are not built all at once. They are assembled over time, with different people and organizations contributing in different ways. One might even argue that the idea of grand plans revisited periodically is itself a relic of early 20th Century progressive thinking. The 21st mode of planning (and replanning), exemplified by shared resources like Wikipedia, is piecemeal, collective, collaborative, crowdsourced, and constant. Instead of a grand plan, we need a series of smaller plans that are united through their common principles and practices.

Abhi Nemani (2014), one of the founders of Code for America, suggests a system of "small (city) pieces, loosely joined." Systems for participatory forms of governance – democracy with a small 'd' – may be most effectively constructed in a series of small steps, or small 'd' democratic ways.

With these principles in mind, it is important to remember that engagement infrastructure can be built in many different ways. In some places, there may already be so many civic assets and opportunities for citizens that little actual building is necessary; rather, efforts should be focused on improving the settings and opportunities, and connecting them with one another as part of an overarching community plan. In other communities, there may be more gaps in the civic picture and new building blocks needed to fill them. Some places may be able to create a comprehensive plan for engagement infrastructure all at once, whereas other communities may make slower, more incremental progress. Every place is likely to have its own unique culture of engagement.

However it is built, however slowly or quickly it develops, and whatever it looks like in the long run, the engagement infrastructure has to work – both for the individuals it serves and the institutions it encompasses. Builders of engagement infrastructure must periodically ask several questions:

- ***Why will people care about this?***
- ***How will it serve our needs as citizens?***
- ***Why will people participate?***
- ***How will this make the work of public officials, public employees, and other stakeholders easier,more effective, and more gratifying?***

To the extent possible, they must develop ways of measuring and benchmarking their answers to these questions.

Above all, the local infrastructure for engagement needs to reflect the needs and goals of ordinary people. Generating broader public understanding and ownership of engagement infrastructure may be important – and may even be absolutely necessary – for building and sustaining that infrastructure.

PRINCIPLES FOR PLANNING TO SUPPORT ENGAGEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE

No matter what issue or geographic jurisdiction they are working on, planners of engagement infrastructure ought to:

- Cross silos within government and between different sets of experts.
- Understand and articulate the broader context and reasons why people might want to participate, going beyond the specific policy decision to the bigger picture.
- Find out where citizens are already assembled, face-to-face and online, and how to tap into those settings.
- Assemble people in new settings and in ways that make further assembly and reassembly more likely.
- Map everything and make those maps publicly available and responsive.
- Build databases and other repositories of information on the community and people who live there.
- Facilitate accountability as much as possible – by giving participants decisions to make and/or by giving decision-makers many chances to respond.
- Assess engagement in ways that correspond with other measurement efforts and allow citizens to be part of the measuring.

The democratic principles that animate this work suggest that citizens should, as a matter of right, have a say in how their communities function. If they do not, the design of civic infrastructure could be yet another aspect of public life that is controlled and concealed by a small elite. In other words, the public should have the opportunity to participate in designing, supporting, and improving public engagement.

- John Stephens and Matt Leighninger

C. CONCLUSION

Innovation in the field of public engagement is dynamic. The Council Initiative on Public Engagement provides an opportunity to think creatively about some of the tensions and emerging questions about public engagement design, process, and impacts.

This report provides a framework to strengthen civic infrastructure, a comprehensive system that includes three core components: **practice, culture, and structure**, to support and sustain excellence in engagement in Edmonton.

This document provides information about engagement generally, with specific examples from Edmonton, and an invitation to think about ideas that are relevant to your neighbourhood.

The structure offered here provides a framework to strengthen engagement and foundational ideas to guide and ground future goals. Innovation and learning in a "living laboratory" builds capacity and knowledge for public engagement, and contributes to a stronger democracy.

This resource is intended to be a contribution and a tool for experimenting, to work within the City and communities to harvest the wisdom of citizens, and co-create ideas that build on local knowledge.

RESOURCES

STRENGTHENING CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE

ELEMENTS & PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

PRACTICE

Engagement can occur in many different contexts and happen in many different ways. There are three main kinds of activities – thick, thin, and conventional – each of these examples of engagement practice uses a wide variety of processes and activities that share common features. Examples of practice to strengthen engagement:

• Regular public meetings that are participatory & efficient • Crowdsourcing & crowdfunding platforms • Participatory Budgeting • Problem-reporting & wiki-mapping platforms

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES FOR ENGAGEMENT

Planning Ahead:
Public participation is an early and integral part of challenge and opportunity identification, planning and design, budgeting, and implementation of city policies, programs, and projects.

Inclusive Design:
The design of a public participation process includes input from appropriate local officials as well as from members of intended participant communities.

Authentic Intent:
A primary purpose of the public participation process is to generate public views and ideas to actually help shape local government action or policy.

Transparency:
Public participation processes are open, honest, and understandable. There is clarity and transparency about public participation process sponsorship, purpose, design, and how decision makers will use the process results.

Inclusiveness and Equity:
Public participation processes identify, reach out to, and encourage participation of the community in its full diversity. Processes respect a range of values and interests and the knowledge of those involved. Historically excluded individuals and groups are included authentically in processes, activities, and decision and policymaking. Impacts, including costs and benefits, are identified and distributed fairly.

Informed Participation:
Participants in the process have information and/or access to expertise consistent with the work that sponsors and conveners ask them to do. Members of the public receive the information they need to participate effectively with sufficient time to study.

Accessible Participation:
Public participation processes are broadly accessible in terms of location, time, and language, and support the engagement of community members with disabilities.

CULTURE

Engagement practices are more efficient and effective with a strong culture of engagement. This civic culture includes the people, civic assets, and supportive spaces for assembly and effective engagement. This culture fosters broad and diverse participation to sustain engagement. For example:

• More participatory and effective neighborhood groups • Hyperlocal online forums (for information and dialogue in a community) • Groups for and of recent immigrants, Aboriginal (Inuit, First Nations and Métis)

STRUCTURE

The structure for supporting engagement consists of laws, metrics, institutions, governmental bodies, training programs, and professional incentives that can support it. Edmonton's Open City initiative is committed to strengthening this structure in a number of ways. Examples of structure to support engagement include:

• Youth councils & other programs for young people • Engagement commissions, bylaws, & policies • Online dashboards to track engagement • Citizens' academies & other training programs • Cross-departmental teams in City Hall

Appropriate Process:
Each public participation process uses one or more engagement formats that are responsive to the needs of identified participant groups and encourage full, authentic, effective and equitable participation consistent with process purposes. Participation processes and techniques are well-designed to appropriately fit the legal authority, scope, character, and impact of a policy or project. Processes adapt to changing conditions as projects move forward.

Use of Information:
The ideas, preferences, and/or recommendations contributed by community members are documented and given consideration by decision-makers. Local officials communicate decisions back to process participants and the broader public, with a description of how the public input was considered and used.

Building Relationships and Community Capacity:
Public participation processes invest in and develop long-term, collaborative working relationships and learning opportunities with community partners and stakeholders. This may include relationships with other temporary or ongoing community participation initiatives.

Evaluation:
Sponsors and participants evaluate each public participation process with the collected feedback, analysis, and learning shared broadly and applied to future public participation efforts for continuous improvement.

Further Reading

The full paper with complete references is available on the Centre for Public Involvement website.

City of Edmonton Council Initiative on Public Engagement:
www.edmonton.ca/city_government/initiatives_innovation/council-initiative-on-public-engagement.aspx

Centre for Public Involvement:
centreforpublicinvolvement.com/work/labels/projects/

City of Edmonton Insight Community:
www.edmonton.ca/programs_services/public_engagement/edmonton-insight-community.aspx

City of Edmonton Citizen Dashboard:
dashboard.edmonton.ca

Edmonton CITYlab:
www.edmonton.ca/citylab.aspx

National Coalition for Deliberation and Dialogue, Managers' Guide to Citizen Engagement:
ncdd.org/rc/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/CJL-PublicDelibManagersGuide.pdf

IAP2 Canada – International Association for Public Participation:
iap2canada.ca

Institute for Local Government :
www.ca-ilg.org

Edmonton's Citizens' Panel on Energy and Climate Challenges final report:
centreforpublicinvolvement.com/work/archives/2012/07/18/energy-transition-project/

Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues:
www.efcl.org

Great Neighbourhoods Program:
www.edmonton.ca/residential_neighbourhoods/building-great-neighbourhoods.aspx

Next Gen:
www.edmontonnextgen.ca

Edmonton Youth Council:
www.edmonton.ca/city_government/city_organization/youth-council-city-of-edmonton.aspx

Participatory Budgeting and Youth Participatory Budgeting Rulebook:
www.cityofboston.gov/images_documents/YPB%20Rulebook_tcm3-44018.pdf

Hamilton PB project, see
www.pbward2.ca/news/pbw2-2014-vote-supports-the-roof-at-st-marks/

For more information on Participatory Budgeting, see
www.participatorybudgeting.org

See ClickFix:
www.fr.seeclickfix.com

PublicStuff:
www.publicstuff.com

Ushahidi:
www.ushahidi.com

City of Vancouver, Vancouver Mayor's Engaged City Task Force Final Report:
vancouver.ca/files/cov/final-report-engaged-city-task-force-2014.pdf
vancouver.ca/your-government/open-data-catalogue.aspx

Planetizen:
www.planetizen.com/node/67656

Civic Spaces Project:
centreforpublicinvolvement.com/work/archives/2013/09/26/edmonton-multicultural-coalition-pilot-project/

City of Edmonton Planning Academy:
www.edmonton.ca/city_government/urban_planning_and_design/planning-academy.aspx

City Studio:
citystudiovancouver.com/what-we-do/

Citizens' Academy:
www.citizensacademy.ca

Civics 101 Toronto:
www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=25e1acb640c21410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD

Next Up:
edmonton.ca/residential_neighbourhoods/building-great-neighbourhoods.aspx
us2.campaign-archive1.com/?u=ccef5bd922055cb76fc47191a&id=6e45318bde

The Story Centre:
storycenter.org

350.org toolkit:
workshops.350.org/toolkit/story/

10 Lessons in More Engaging Citizen Engagement:
www.planetizen.com/node/67656

Centre for Urban Pedagogy (CUP):
welcometocup.org

NOTES