Practical Guide to Inclusive
Community Engagement
in the City of Albuquerque

When we think of community engagement, we usually jump straight to deciding between a survey, a public meeting, community forum, focus group, or the ubiquitous town hall (virtual town halls included). Often our decisions are based on time and budget constraints, which are real. In this guide, we will discuss ways of using these strategies, but first, we pose a series of questions and provide links to additional resources to prompt deeper thinking for deeper engagement.

We believe that the key to closing equity gaps and resolving social vulnerability is direct participation by impacted communities in the development and implementation of solutions and policy decisions that directly impact them. This level of participation can unleash much needed capacity, but also requires initial capacity investments to strengthen our local democracy.

"The most important element to community engagement is addressing issues that the community itself has identified as important. We get to know what's important by being in relationship with community and sharing power. It transforms our role from one of informing to one of consulting those we seek to serve."

\- Michelle Melendez, Director OEI

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Community engagement can be transactional or empowering,

so the first question to ask is:

Why you are pursuing community engagement?

• If you need to inform stakeholders, you may use a simple callsheet that lists who is responsible for calling whom and by when. We distinguish community engagement from one-way communication, which is achieved through phone calls, public notices, press releases, social media posts, flyers, fact sheets and presentations, including those given online.

• We also distinguish community engagement from community outreach, which is a communications strategy. See our companion Inclusive Communications and Outreach Guide for tips on how to ensure that information is more accessible and that it reaches vulnerable populations within your target audience.

This guide to inclusive community engagement is designed to help you turn City Hall inside out, and to make local government more accessible, responsive, inclusive, accountable and transparent. This guide was developed with input from community organizers, staff of Native American, African American, Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, data experts, as well as other jurisdictions and national best practices from the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE).

The City Council adopted R-20-75 to strengthen and re-affirm our City's commitment to racial equity and social justice. This resolution defines inequities as disparities that are systemic yet preventable, and, therefore, considered unjust or unfair; and calls upon all levels of City government to use toolkits like this one, and to incorporate the expertise of those most negatively impacted by inequities in the development and implementation of policy, program and budget decisions.

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We believe that racially-and culturally-appropriate community engagement delivers better quality decisions, more responsive programs and services and ultimately more equitable outcomes for the populations we serve. Even with time and budget constraints, we can better engage our communities so that we unlock collective power and capacity for transformative solutions.

• Some degree of conflict is inherent in any setting where there is a history of colonization and racism. Conflicts are most common around issues of land, language, and economics/resource allocation.

• Good quality, meaningful community engagement takes time. Cutting corners costs more in the long run and erodes public confidence and trust

Take time between steps to evaluate the process. Is it working so far? Is it resulting in usable data? Are unknown priorities or areas of interest now visible. Consider the input/output ratio – are residents getting out as much as they put in? They are the experts of their own communities. How is the process building residents' power?

- Andrea Calderon, Race Equity Data Analyst

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Administration's Values
Proof Points

Accessible
- Ambassadors, directors, managers and staff are easy to reach, approachable
- Meetings are easy to schedule, timely and productive

Responsive
- Constituents can expect a timely response and for their needs to be addressed
- Programs and services improve with public input. Those closest to the issue have solutions

Inclusive
- Communities that have been historically left out are invited and feel welcomed as equal partners to identify issues, help design the programs and work through solutions
- Accommodations of many kinds make it possible for people with different abilities to fully participate. These include, but are not limited to, language access, including ASL, childcare, location, time of day and whether food is provided and what kind of food is served

Accountable
- We work for the people of Albuquerque and we are responsible for spending tax dollars to benefit the public and to make Albuquerque a better place for all its residents

Transparent
- The public knows what type of community engagement is planned, what the process will be, what the timeline is, how and when decisions will be made and by whom

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Who have you listened to? Who have you sat down with? How can you lift up voices who know best, whose lives are the most affected?

- Maria Brazil, Administrative Coordinator

Surveys

Surveys are good for gathering input from small and large numbers of people on a specific set of questions, such as choosing a location or course of action.

- The City of Albuquerque has an enterprise subscription to Survey Monkey,which enables surveys of select individuals via email, or open (public) surveys via social media or public lists. Contact DTI to get access to the City's Survey Monkey account.

- Survey design is important. Ask for help from an expert if possible.

- Survey methodology is important for sound analysis and conclusions.

- When asking about city government, be explicit. Not everybody recognizes "City of Albuquerque" as referring to city government.

- Avoid jargon, acronyms and references to programs that are not well-known or common knowledge.

- Use a likert-type scale to measure level of agreement or disagreement or intensity of feelings for a given item.

- Explain what you mean when you ask people to rank a set of choices. Give instructions on how they can put items in the order or rank.

- Set ranges for questions about age, years, income.

- Collect demographic information consistent with the US Census to allow for comparison. See our Guide to Collecting Demographics.

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Townhalls

Townhalls are good for meeting in person or online with large numbers of constituents to both listen and share information. Townhalls are the perfect forum for answering questions that are important to the public.

- The City took the Town Hall forum to the next level in 2020, with the Mayor's Bilingual Telephone Town Halls reaching up to 100,000 English speakers and 28,000 Spanish speakers at a time through a paid service.

- Councilor Lan Sena teamed up with the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs to host Facebook Live-streamed bilingual town halls organized on the Zoom platform in both Vietnamese and Spanish. In both cases, trained professional interpreters are needed, and prep time is much appreciated by them, as keeping up with fast-talking English-speakers is a challenge.

Think about the communities within city government as much as we do outside the institution. Take time to really see and hear the people who work for the city. They have a lot to offer.

- Giovianna Burrell, OEI Culture Change

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Public Meetings

Public meetings bring diverse groups of stakeholders together for a specific purpose. They can be a starting point or an ongoing means of engaging. When done well, they can build a sense of shared purpose.

- Who is on the planning committee? The earlier you engage community and stakeholders in planning, the better.

- Does the process reflect, honor and welcome these community members? How?

- Does the venue, set-up, and time truly enable participation of these community members?

- Is virtual participation a viable option that helps to mitigate certain barriers?

- Besides newspaper notices, email notifications, flyers and media/social media posts, what other methods of outreach are you using? In what languages? Can you work through trusted messengers?

Some of the most comprehensive approaches to community engagement use a combination of methods. Case studies of the community engagement processes for the Albuquerque Community Safety Department; Race, History and Healing Project; and Gateway Center are provided for a deeper dive.

See more of the tools in our toolbox, including:
- Worksheet to Guide Inclusive Community Engagement
- Inclusive Outreach Guide
- Basic Demographic Questionaire
- Spectrum of Community Engagement

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Thank you! Email oei@cabq.gov for technical assistance

Quick Decision Support Tool

Goals for Engagement	Survey	Public Meetings	Town Hall
Reach thousands of people	☒		
Reach hundreds of people	☒	☒	☒
Concentrate on small group of people	☒	☒	
Pose questions with binary or finite set of answers (such as choosing among certain locations or services)	☒	☒	
Have interactive dialog between participants and organizers		☒	☒
Convey a significant amount of information from the City (such as an update on the A.R.T. project)		☒	☒
Create space for people to interact with other community members to discuss the topic		☒	☒
Use as little resource as possible (time, money)	☒		

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