




## THE SPECTRUM OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TO OWNERSHIP

The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership charts a pathway to strengthen and transform our local democracies. Thriving, diverse, equitable communities are possible through deep participation, particularly by communities commonly excluded from democratic voice & power. The stronger our local democracies, the more capacity we can unleash to address our toughest challenges, and the more capable we are of surviving and thriving through economic, ecological, and social crises. It is going to take all of us to adequately address the complex challenges our cities and regions are facing. It is time for a new wave of community-driven civic leadership.

Leaders across multiple sectors, such as community-based organizations, local governments, philanthropic partners, and facilitative leaders trusted by communities, can use this spectrum to assess and revolutionize community engagement efforts to advance community-driven solutions.





This tool was developed by Rosa González of Facilitating Power, in part drawing on content from a number of public participation tools, including Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation, and the Public Participation Spectrum created by the International Association for Public Participation. The contents have been piloted with municipal community-centered committees for racial equity and environmental justice at the cities of Portland Washington, Providence Rhode Island, Seattle Washington, and Washington DC; and with the Building Healthy Communities Initiative in Salinas, California, and developed in partnership with Movement Strategy Center.



Photo by Monserrat Soto



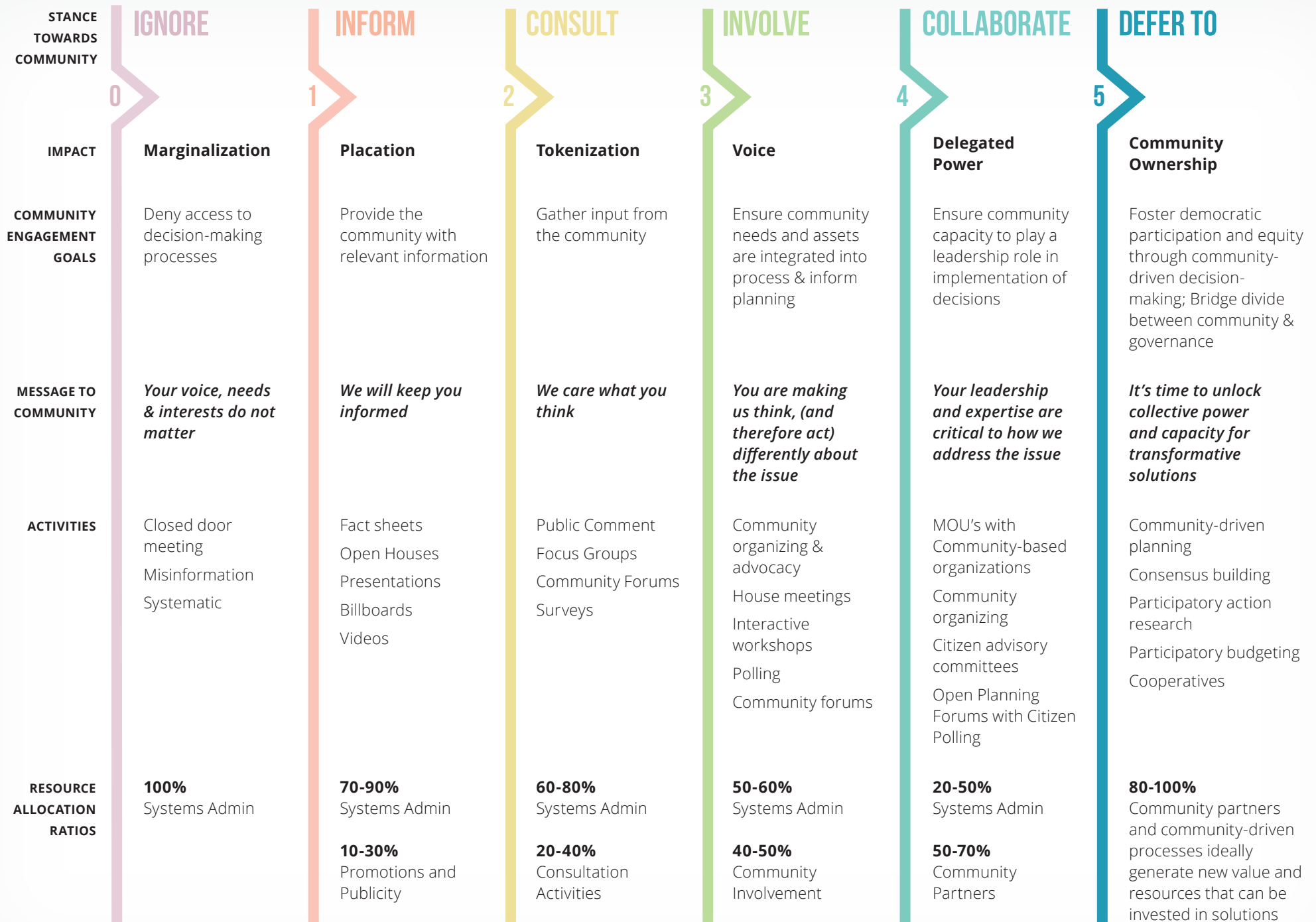
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# THE SPECTRUM OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TO OWNERSHIP





## WHY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TO OWNERSHIP?

The key to closing equity gaps and resolving climate 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 across multiple sectors to strengthen our local democracies through systems changes and culture shifts.

- *Community-based organizations* play a critical role in cultivating **community capacity** to participate in and lead decision-making processes that meet community needs and maximize community strengths.
- *Staff and electeds within local government* have essential roles to play in helping to facilitate **systems changes** to increase community voice and decrease disproportionate harms caused to low-income communities and communities of color.
- *Philanthropic partners* have a role to play in partnering with impacted communities to **balance uneven power dynamics** and ensure adequate resourcing of essential community capacities.
- *Third party facilitators and evaluators* can help **cultivate the conditions for collaboration and participation across sectors**, while assessing and documenting progress towards practice goals and community solutions.



Photo by Daniel Ibarra



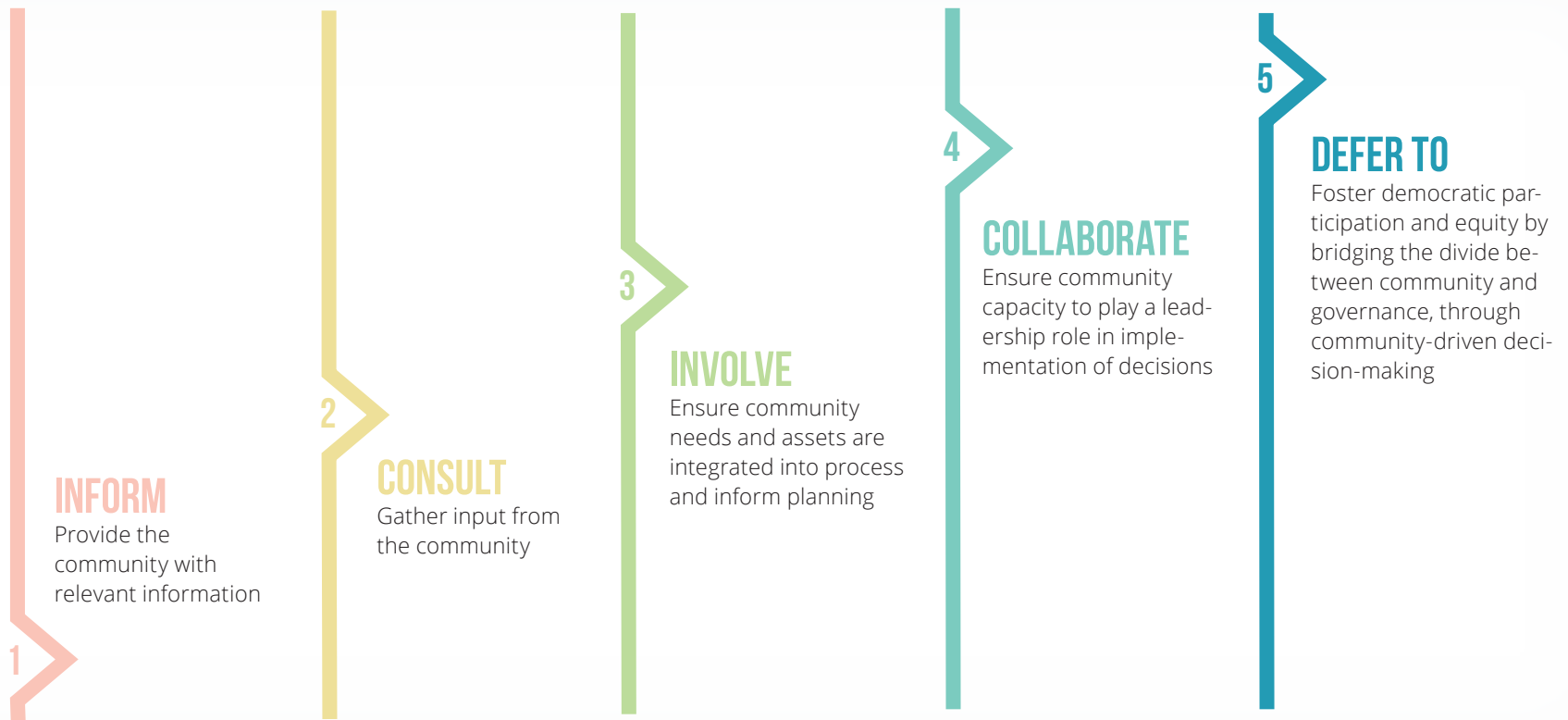
Photo by Monserrat Soto

This spectrum can be used by local governments and by non-profit organizations or community groups working to facilitate community participation in solutions development and decision-making. It is designed to:

- 1. Acknowledge marginalization** as the status quo practice of current systems that have been historically designed to exclude certain populations, namely low-income communities, communities of color, women, youth, previously incarcerated people, and queer or gender non-conforming community members. This understanding is important because if concerted efforts are not made to break-down existing barriers to participation, then by default marginalization occurs.
- 2. Assert a clear vision** for rebuilding our local democracies, as key to solving today's toughest crises, through inclusion, racial justice, and community ownership.
- 3. Articulate a developmental process** for rebuilding our local democracies that requires significant investment in the capacity to participate as well as the capacity to break-down systemic barriers to community participation.
- 4. Assess community participation efforts** and progress toward participation goals.

## WHY DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES?

With the exception of marginalization (a zero on the spectrum), each of the steps along the spectrum are essential for building capacity for community collaboration and governance. Communities must be informed, consulted, and involved; but through deeper collaboration we can unleash unprecedented capacity to develop and implement the solutions to today's biggest crises in our urban centers. To achieve racial equity and environmental justice, we must build from a culture of collaboration to a culture of whole governance, in which decisions are driven by the common good. Whole governance and community ownership are needed to break the cycle of perpetual advocacy for basic needs that many communities find themselves in. **Developmental stages allow us to recognize where we are at, and set goals for where we can go together through conscious and collective practice, so key to transforming systems.**



## UNDERSTANDING THE SPECTRUM WITHIN LOCAL CONTEXTS

Through facilitated dialogue, reflect on each of the developmental phases in the context of your city/region.

PHASE	DESCRIPTION	REFLECTION QUESTIONS
<b>0</b> <b>IGNORE</b> MARGINALIZATION	<p><b>Marginalization represents the status quo, given current systems have been historically designed to exclude certain populations. If concerted efforts are not made to break-down existing barriers to participation, then by default, marginalization occurs.</b> The history of the United States can be understood as generations of social movements striving to extend the rights of democracy to groups that have been previously excluded. The health of our democracy AND our economies depends on our capacity to recognize and address marginalization and exclusion. There is a direct connection between economic exclusion (slavery, taking land by force, taxation without representation, exploitation of labor, etc.) and political exclusion (denying citizenship and voting rights, top-down decision-making practices, etc.).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the roots of systematic marginalization in your city/region? How is political exclusion related to local economic factors?</li> <li>• How does the legacy of political exclusion based on race and class persist to today? What forms does it currently take in your city/region?</li> </ul>
<b>1</b> <b>INFORM</b> PLACATION	<p><b>Information is the foundation for taking action towards real solutions to the threats we face. As the saying goes, knowledge is power. If, however, community engagement efforts remain at the level of one-way information sharing, such efforts result in placation.</b> The role of the community is reduced to absorbing information from those with more positional power; meanwhile, the notion that every day people can actually shape solutions is stifled.</p> <p>Community-based organizations can play a key role in ensuring access to information about issues, services, solutions, etc. in ways that are culturally rooted and relevant.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does information flow look like for impacted communities in your city/region? What is contributing to information flow? What is hindering it?</li> <li>• Reflecting on existing community assets, what will it take for impacted communities to have equitable access to information about the issues that directly impact them?</li> </ul>
<b>2</b> <b>CONSULT</b> TOKENIZATION	<p><b>The most common form of 'community engagement' among mainstream institutions is consultation, usually in the form of semi-interactive meetings in which members of the community have the chance to offer input into pre-baked plans.</b> This is of course a step up from one-way information-sharing; a two-way exchange is initiated. The biggest critique of this form of engagement is that decisions are often already made; the community input period simply serves to check a box. What's more, if the people participating have not had the chance to develop a shared analysis of the problem or articulate a shared vision, values, and priorities, with their peers, then they don't actually represent a 'community,' they are simply participating as individuals, and therefore are only 'tokens' of the community they are supposed to represent. This is the trap of consultation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When is it appropriate for impacted communities to be in a consultation role? What should impacted communities in your city/region be consulted on?</li> <li>• Where, in your experience of community engagement does it feel like consultation can be a trap?</li> <li>• What is needed to move beyond consultation and get to solutions that benefit from the genuine involvement of impacted communities?</li> </ul>

## PHASE

## DESCRIPTION

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

3

## INVOLVE

## VOICE &amp; POWER SHIFT

**Community organizing and power building is needed to bring community engagement out of tokenization and into true involvement of impacted residents in the decisions that impact them.** Community organizing offers vital elements to local democracies: 1) Community power puts needed pressure on local systems to make change; 2) Education and leadership development supports residents to make informed decisions that reflect the needs and interests of their communities; 3) Organizing builds the public will to develop, advocate for, and implement viable solutions; 4) Community organizing can also balance uneven power dynamics so that communities can effectively collaborate among sectors with more institutional power.

- What does it take for residents of impacted communities in your City to have a real voice in the decision-making that impacts them? What are the examples?
- What is needed to build sustained voice & power?
- What community-based organizations are building an informed base of resident leaders with the capacity to advocate on behalf of the needs and interests of the community?

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## COLLABORATE

## DELEGATED POWER

**As a culture of systems change develops through community organizing, advocacy, and relationship-building, the limits of local systems to carry out changes on their own becomes apparent. At this point, the opportunity to collaborate across sectors emerges and makes culture shift possible.** Through the leadership and delegated power of community leaders, structures of participation can be made more accessible and culturally relevant to groups that have been historically excluded. In turn, collaboration requires and makes possible more trusting relationships and the healing of old divides within systems that tend to be more transactional. Collaboration also brings together unique strengths, assets, and capacities essential to enacting needed solutions, and that unconsciously go untapped.

- Where are the opportunities for meaningful collaboration between impacted communities & local government to co-develop solutions to racial & environmental injustices?
- To what extent have impacted communities built an informed base of community members with the power and influence to achieve policy & systems change?
- What culture shift and system changes are needed for authentic collaboration between institutions and impacted communities?

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## DEFER TO

## COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

**We are building to community ownership to ensure communities have a direct say over what is needed to survive and thrive.**

Throughout each of the developmental phases, we must be consciously building the capacity for communities currently impacted by poverty, pollution, and political disenfranchisement to have increasingly more control over the resources needed to live, such as food, housing, water, and energy. Strengthening local democracies is about ending dependency and restoring dignity.

- What role will community ownership play in closing equity gaps?
- What is your collective vision for local community ownership?
- What can you be doing now to lay the groundwork for community ownership?
- What infrastructure for community ownership is needed that you can start building now?



## USING THE SPECTRUM AS A TOOL FOR PLANNING AND GOAL SETTING

### PURPOSE

To assess current community engagement efforts and set goals for how efforts can advance along the spectrum toward greater community ownership. This exercise can be conducted by a single entity around a single campaign or their work generally, and can also be carried out by a collaborative entity that includes multiple stakeholders. It is best facilitated by a 3rd party facilitator.

### MATERIALS

- Color copies of the Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership
- Post-its, Flip chart paper and markers

### PROCESS

#### ACTIVITY

**Welcome and Context:** Work together to set the context for the meeting and the purpose for adopting the spectrum to guide the work you are doing with the communities to whom you are accountable.

#### FACILITATOR NOTES

Read through the Applying the Spectrum to Local Context worksheet prior to facilitating the workshop.

**Apply the Spectrum to the Local Context:** Ask people to review the spectrum in pairs, noting what stands out to them and what questions it brings up. Open it up for pairs to share observations and questions in the whole group, using the conversation as a springboard into applying the spectrum to the local context:

Invite pairs or small groups to each discuss one of the sections and afterwards report out their thinking to the whole group.

After each report out, invite the rest of the group to share any additional thoughts on how that stage of the spectrum relates to the local context you all are working in.

Alternative approach to this exercise: create slides for each of the stages along the spectrum. For each stage, present the basic description (provided in the table) in your own words, and then discuss the questions in small groups or as a whole group. Make sure you have a solid grasp of the local context, and prompt people, as needed, to zero in on what's most important to understand about the context.

Use the worksheet on page 6-7 to apply the spectrum to the local context.

**Assess & Reflect:** Now that the group has a thorough understanding of the spectrum and how it applies to your local context, use the spectrum to assess your current work, or the general state of community engagement in your region (or both):

Give pairs or small groups 5 minutes to discuss where along the spectrum the work currently is and why

Invite everyone to hold up the number of fingers that corresponds to their assessment of the work and discuss.

Make sure the group understands each stage along the spectrum is important and has a role to play in building community capacity to govern. For example, there is no shame in being at a level 1 on the spectrum; ensuring the community is informed is an essential part of the work.

**Set Goals:** Ask pairs or small groups to now discuss where along the spectrum they think the work should be within a given time frame or as the result of a given cam-

aign/project, and why. Share out and build consensus on the goal. Discuss what it will takes to reach the goal.

The goals you set can help guide your shared work and can be used to evaluate the work along the way

## APPLYING THE SPECTRUM TO POLICY DEVELOPMENT

When it comes to policy development, where you land on the spectrum is primarily based on what point in the policy development process you engage community. This tool provides a brief overview of what community engagement might look like at each

major phase of the policy development process. Local policy makers can use this chart to determine at which point in the policy development process they will engage (and ideally partner) with community-based organizations from communities most impacted by the given policy issue, as it provides an overview of the costs and benefits of each approach, as well as an overview of possible activities at each stage.

POINT OF ENGAGEMENT	DESCRIPTION	POTENTIAL BENEFITS	POTENTIAL COSTS	COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES	CITY STAFF ACTIVITIES
<p data-bbox="247 451 268 488">4</p> <p data-bbox="44 521 254 706"><b>Whole Process from Problem Definition to Solution Development &amp; Implementation</b></p> <p data-bbox="44 748 243 873"><b>COLLABORATIVE &amp; COMMUNITY-DRIVEN GOVERNANCE</b></p>	<p>In this ideal scenario, the entire policy development process is driven by a multi-stakeholder community partnership and is facilitated by authentic collaboration with city staff to achieve the best possible policy solution.</p>	<p>New policy is responsive to actual community needs; has political will to not only pass but be fully implemented with community leadership; builds community capacity to lead in the process.</p>	<p>An investment must be made in community capacity to carry out planning process; this investment can be made by a philanthropic partner, the local government or through a combination of public and private dollars.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visioning &amp; Priority Setting</li> <li>• Problem Definition &amp; Community assessment</li> <li>• Solutions Development &amp; possible piloting</li> <li>• Collaboration with policy/planner to translate solutions into policy</li> <li>• Development of metrics</li> <li>• Organizing educational forums with City</li> <li>• Meetings with decision-makers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-fundraising with community-based organizations</li> <li>• Attendance at and sometimes co-planning of community-based events and activities</li> <li>• Capacity-building workshops to support community-driven policy development</li> <li>• Translation of community priorities into policy</li> </ul>
<p data-bbox="247 1003 268 1040">3</p> <p data-bbox="44 1057 216 1149"><b>Policy Development Phase 1</b></p> <p data-bbox="44 1182 216 1242"><b>COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT</b></p>	<p>In this scenario, City staff/planners manage the policy development process and work with a number of community partners to engage community voice and participation at the outset of the process.</p>	<p>Trust is built between Community and City; City gains valuable information to develop a more effective policy; Community groups help to build the political will to pass the policy; Ideally the collaboration continues into the implementation phase.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An investment must be made in community capacity to participate in the policy development process</li> <li>• Because community groups don't have as much agency in the process, it may take more effort to facilitate engagement and buy-in; can become dissolution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organize or participate in Community Advisory Committee</li> <li>• Conduct or participate in Problem Definition &amp; Community Assessment</li> <li>• Conduct or participate in Solutions Development and Possible Piloting</li> <li>• Organize and/or participate in Community Forums &amp; Focus Groups</li> <li>• Hold Meetings with elected</li> <li>• Conduct Equity Impact Assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invitation to community partners to participate</li> <li>• Co-fundraising with community-based organizations</li> <li>• Planning (or co-planning) of community engagement events and activities</li> <li>• Translation of community priorities into policy</li> <li>• Co-development of equity metrics (or planning to implement pre-existing metrics)</li> </ul>

POINT OF ENGAGEMENT	DESCRIPTION	POTENTIAL BENEFITS	POTENTIAL COSTS	COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES	CITY STAFF ACTIVITIES
<p><b>Policy Development Phase 2</b></p> <p>COMMUNITY CONSULTATION</p>	<p>In this scenario, City staff/planners manage the policy development process and wait until the policy is already in draft form before engaging any community partners</p>	<p>Community partners have the opportunity to provide critical input before a public unveiling of the proposed project thereby helping to screen for negative impacts and political roadblocks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An investment must be made in community capacity to participate in the policy development process</li> <li>• This approach runs the risk of tokenizing community voice</li> <li>• It may be too late to make significant changes to the policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in community forums, focus groups, or surveys</li> <li>• Conduct or participate in equity assessment of policy proposal</li> <li>• Possible protest or complaint if recommendations are not heeded, and experience tokenization or being used to rubber stamp decisions that are already made</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct community engagement process</li> <li>• Facilitate equity assessment of policy proposal</li> <li>• Translate community input into changes to the draft policy</li> </ul>
<p><b>Public Review of Proposed Policy</b></p> <p>INFORMED COMMUNITY</p>	<p>In this scenario, community partners are not pro-actively included in the policy development process, but may take advantage of existing mechanisms to express support or objection to the proposed policy; and/or may be invited by city staff or elected officials to do so</p>	<p>Existing public mechanisms at least provide for people to be informed of proposed policy and have their comments recorded.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposed policy has not been effectively vetted by the people who may be most impacted by it; potential impacts can include significant costs to local government downstream</li> <li>• City staff/planners run the risk of community groups protesting the proposed policy and lobbying for 'no' votes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare community members to make public comment</li> <li>• Possible protest, depending on the potential impacts</li> </ul>	<p>Prepare for potential fallout</p>
<p><b>Proposed Policy Up for A Vote</b></p> <p>MARGINALIZED COMMUNITY</p>	<p>At this point, it is too late for community groups to have any genuine input to the policy</p>	<p>Temporary time savings, not taking the time to engage community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposed policy has not been effectively vetted by the people who may be most impacted by it; potential impacts can include significant costs to local government downstream.</li> <li>• City staff/planners run the risk of community groups protesting the policy if it passes.</li> </ul>	<p>Possible protest</p>	<p>Prepare for potential fallout</p>

POINT OF ENGAGEMENT	DESCRIPTION	POTENTIAL BENEFITS	POTENTIAL COSTS	COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES	CITY STAFF ACTIVITIES
<p><b>4</b></p> <p><b>Reform Existing Policy through Community Leadership</b></p> <p><b>COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE</b></p>	<p>In the case of an existing policy, community groups can work in partnership with City staff to assess it and develop a policy for repealing or amending it to undo roadblocks to community-driven solutions</p>	<p>Policy barriers to Community and City goals are removed; Collaboration between community groups and city staff is strengthened; builds community capacity to lead in the process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An investment must be made in community capacity to participate in the policy development process</li> <li>• It may take more difficult to reform an existing policy than it does to develop a new one.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visioning &amp; Priority Setting</li> <li>• Problem Definition &amp; Community assessment</li> <li>• Solutions Development &amp; possible piloting</li> <li>• Collaboration with policy/planner to translate solutions into policy reform</li> <li>• Development of metrics</li> <li>• Organizing educational forums with City</li> <li>• Meetings with electeds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-fundraising with community-based organizations</li> <li>• Attendance at and sometimes co-planning of community-based events and activities</li> <li>• Capacity-building workshops to support community-driven policy reform</li> <li>• Translation of community priorities into policy reform language and technical tools</li> </ul>



Photo by Monserrat Soto

# APPLYING THE SPECTRUM TO COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN DEVELOPMENT

## PURPOSE

For use by community-based organizations to design campaigns that build towards community ownership.

## MATERIALS

- Copies of the Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership
- A poster with the campaign planning questions written out, leaving space for post-its under each category
- Post-its, flip chart paper and markers

## PROCESS

### ACTIVITY

**Welcome and Context** Clarify the purpose of the workshop, the context of the campaign, and the roles that the people in the room are playing. Give everyone a chance to share who they are and what inspires them to participate in the campaign.

**Sociometric Lines** Delineate an imaginary line down the middle of the room and establish two poles:  
On one side: Our community is ready to take full ownership of [insert the issue you are working on];  
And on the other side: There is no way we are ready to take full ownership over it.

- Ask people to stand anywhere along the imaginary line to express their view on community readiness for more ownership. Reflect for a moment on where the group has landed.
- Then, ask people what is needed for the community to take full ownership over the given issue/solution you are working on. Scribe what they say is needed.

**Campaign Planning** Review the following questions with the group, and then invite them to generate answers in pairs on post-its and stick them to the corresponding section. Afterwards, read through, reflect, and refine the plan together.

- A. **VISION:** What would community ownership look like on this issue? What solutions would increase community ownership over essential elements?
- B. **STRATEGY:** What opportunities are there to collaborate with local government to advance solutions? With philanthropy? With the business community? Other key sectors?

- C. **POWER-BUILDING TACTICS:** Where, when, how, and on what do we need to assert our voice and influence? How are we building power to ensure our voice is heard?
- D. **PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH:** Who should we consult with on solutions? How can we consult with people in a way that will build our base or coalition?
- E. **EDUCATION:** What information do we need to take informed action? What information does our base need?

### FACILITATOR NOTES

People connect with each other and with purpose of the meeting and campaign.

Keep the list the group generates (what is needed for community ownership) and use it to help guide the planning in the next section. It can also be used to evaluate campaign tactics.

These campaign planning questions correspond to stages 1-5 on the spectrum, starting with stage 5: a vision for community ownership, and working backward from there.

## USING THE SPECTRUM AS A TOOL FOR ASSESSING PROJECTS, PROGRAMS & CAMPAIGNS

### PURPOSE

To assess current community engagement efforts and set goals for how efforts can advance along the spectrum toward greater community ownership. This exercise can be conducted by a single entity around a single campaign or their work generally, and can also be carried out by a collaborative entity that includes multiple stakeholders. It is best facilitated by a 3rd party facilitator.

### MATERIALS

- Color copies of the Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership
- Post-its, Flip chart paper and markers

### PROCESS

#### ACTIVITY

**Welcome and Context** Appreciate everyone for participating in the evaluation. Provide an overview of where in the given project is in it's evolution and share the significance purpose of the evaluation at this particular point. Ask everyone to share why they chose to participate in this evaluation. What are they hoping to achieve by taking the time to reflect?

#### FACILITATOR NOTES

The goal here is to establish a shared purpose for the assessment

**Review the Spectrum** Briefly share why the spectrum was adopted to guide this project, and review the stages of the spectrum, using the first three rows of the spectrum and perhaps the bolded content of the table titled, "Applying the Spectrum to Local Contexts."

This is an opportunity to ground everyone in the bigger picture of the work.

#### Reflection and Evaluation in Pairs or Small Groups

Give each pair or small group two post-its of two different colors: one color represents the group's assessment of the work when we started and the other color represents the group's assessment of the work now.

*fall along the spectrum now? 3) Why? 4) What progress has been made, if any? 5) What changes or improvements would you like to see in [insert relevant time frame] to advance along the spectrum? What feels possible now?*

Doing the assessment in pairs or small groups gives people the opportunity for more depth and honesty than might be possible in the big group. Seeing the visual of the before and after post-its on the poster spectrum, helps the group see the progress that has been made.

Offer the pairs (or small groups) some prompts for reflection. For example: 1) *Where along the spectrum would [insert specific work] fall on the spectrum [insert a past benchmark]? 2) Thinking about your experience in [insert specific work] over the last [insert relevant time frame] where would it*

Invite pairs (or small groups) to put their post-its up on the poster with the blank spectrum table, and reflect with the group, asking, *What do you notice? What progress have we made? Scribe the progress made.*

**Set priorities for Improvement** Next, ask the group to share their thoughts on the question #5: *What changes or improvements would you like to see in [insert relevant time frame] to advance along the spectrum? What feels possible now? Scribe their answers as a list.*

Give everyone 2-3 sticker dots and ask them to stick them on their top 2-3 areas for improvement. Once all the dots are up, reflect with the group: *What areas of improvement are most important to the next phase of work? Once the top 2-3 areas of improvement are clear, discuss: what will it take to implement these?*

Everything in the agenda so far has been building to this point of setting goals for collective improvement based on thoughtful reflection on what is possible now.