Centre for
Public Impact
A BCG FOUNDATION

Citywide Equitable Engagement Cohort Capstone Presentation

April 14, 2023

Our group consisted of 6 team members from across the city

Gwen Thompson, she/her. Community Relations Analyst, Housing Bureau

Cassandra Scholte, she/her, Arts & Culture Empowerment Program, Development Services

Marco Mejía, He/him/él Community Engagement Program Manager, Development Services

Malcolm Hoover, he/him, Senior Community Engagement Coordinator, Portland Parks

Josee Kangabe, She/Her Community Development Coordinator, Civic Life

Jessica Terlikowski. She/her, Environmental Remediation Coordinator, Environmental Services

Our teams' focus: Building and/or repairing community trust to ensure inclusive decision-making at the City.

Question: How can the City build meaningful and trusting relationships with Portland's diverse communities to ensure their voices have a real impact on policy making?

Background

Getting more representation at the table! Government is not representative of the people it serves and the community members they do collaborate with often do not represent those who have the greatest need or who have faced the greatest challenges. There is a feeling that when "community engagement" happens, it is typically targeting people who will validate the perspective the city already has, rather than challenge it or bring forth new ideas.

Throughout the program, we gained tools to help with this project, and with our existing engagement work.

What we gained	How it supports our work
Systems Mapping Skills: Power & Policies	Helps with identifying power and policymaking.
Asset Mapping Skills: Community Assets	Helps with identifying community assets, community organizations, and those most affected by City policies and practices.
Connections with other City Equitable Engagement Practitioners	Lasting professional relationships can be leveraged to explore and share best practices, experiences, future networking and continued co-learning.

How can we apply these skills to strengthen our impact in Portland?

Systems thinking...

Systems thinking requires a shift in our perception of the world around us. In order to build a new multidimensional thinking framework, we need to discover the dynamics and interconnectedness of the systems at play. This is where systems mapping tools come in — they provide an exploration of the system, communicate understanding, and allow for the identification of knowledge gaps, intervention points, and insights.

Tools for Systems Thinkers: Systems Mapping | by Leyla Acaroglu | Disruptive Design | Medium

A Few Quotes from our Listening Sessions...

"Anti-racism training must precede asking people of color to "show up," for real listening to occur."

"A lot of bureau's hand pick community to serve on stakeholder and steering groups – people who will support what the City wants to do already, and will reaffirm what the City wants."

"There is a lack of understanding of what engagement is."

"Those with lived experience should be valued - and compensated – they are the experts."

"So, you certainly can't build trust if you're excluding folks and making decisions on their behalf."

"To build trust, I think first you have to stop the harm that you're creating."

Through examining where power sits, we discovered these themes...

...which informed a powerful set of ideas from community members who are seldom heard.
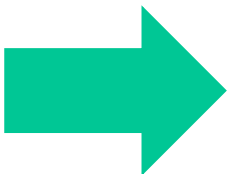
1 We discovered that the most affected are the least heard. The same people are consistently invited "to the decision making table" and their voice is taken to be representative of a large/diverse/complex community group (based on race/ ethnicity/demogr aphics.)

2 We discovered that lazy engagement has become normalized, where historical and related knowledge/facts are available yet not considered before engagement begins.

3 We discovered that transactional and tokenistic engagement is the standard approach. We need to reassess the "weak and distrustful" survey "extractive/data mining" approach with limited engagement.

1 Our solution is to ensure the most affected are leading the discussion. We need more robust engagement – real relationship building with multiple community members.

2 We need to do our homework! Engage colleagues to find out what efforts have already occurred and what resulted from them; research the community we are engaging; review previous internal and external surveys, and reports that provide insights to inform questions and prevent asking questions community has already answered.

3 And, we need a significant investment of time and money to build trust and true partnership which is mutualistic and transformative.

Based on our deep community listening work, we recommend that the engagement process be consistently evaluated by a professional community engagement manager – hired for each bureau. We would pose these questions: Are our engagements circular or linear? Is the engagement transactional or tokenistic? Are they reflective of true partnership and real representation? Is follow up built in (circular communication), explaining what was learned and how it will be used?

Why?
To make sure engagement is not transactional which creates distrust.

How?
Ensure accessibility, acknowledge cultural differences, invest substantial time and money, and guarantee accountability.

When & Who?
Within a year. Support of Leadership, City Council, Equity Managers, and Community to hire Community Engagement Managers for each Bureau.

To build authentic trust with the community and bring those that are most impacted to the table and into these rooms, we need your buy-in.

Thank you for your time!

What questions do you have?

Citywide Equitable Engagement Cohort Reflections and Review

April 14, 2023

Our group consisted of five team members from across the City

Kristin Brown
She/Her
Communications
Coordinator
OMF-CAO
311 Program

Kimberléa Ruffu
she/they
Developed Parks
Coordinator
Parks and Recreation

Odalis Perez
Community
Engagement
Coordinator
She/Her
Parks & Recreation

Carlee Smith
Grants Coordinator
She/Her
Civic Life

Caroline Pope, a coordinator with Portland Street Response was also in our group!

Making knowledge, information, and resources more available

Our group's theme was on the issue of *building trust* between the community and our city government through making knowledge, information, and resources more available.

This presentation is focused on our experience with the community listening partner component of the cohort and includes their perspectives and some of our reflections.

Recently completed "Leaders of East Portland" mural by Alex Chiu SE 122nd

Based on the community listening work, *we wanted to share their feedback...*

Community Partner is a director of non-profit supporting East African Community. Felt their culture was neglected by City Government and creation of non-profit opened up opportunities to be at the table and advocate for services and resources.

Believes there should be more opportunities for collaboration between immigrant and refugee communities as well as other underrepresented communities.

Sees a need for multicultural gatherings, events, and activities to share the beauty and strengths of different cultures.

Has had recent positive experience with participation in local metro projects. Feels their community input is being heard and suggestions and recommendations are being implemented. Is hopeful for future similar experiences.

Odalis Perez / Community Partner Take Aways

Through the listening work of this cohort, I'm uplifting my community partner who works with an outer East Portland non-profit...

For many across Latine communities, the City/government – *regardless of bureau or agency scope of work* – is equated **with law enforcement.** This association inhibits trust building.
Be clear that engaging with the City, seeking resources will **not** result in *the potential to face deportation or criminalization.*

Food holds an important role in an engagement. Hosting in person meetings with a meal offering often goes a long way in both increasing participation and trust – this is especially true if meetings where the City is seeking input or relationship building are in the afternoon or evenings.

PP&R and the City need an effective **translation policy** to ensure Spanish speaking communities have access to public info and resources. Culturally specific CBOs fill a critical communication gap and *the lack of multilingual content disempowers community members from fully participating*.

Kimberléa Ruffu / Community Partner Perspective

Community listening work reflection....

When the idea of the capstone project was introduced to the larger cohort I wasn't immediately happy about engaging a community member in this way. While we could offer compensation to our community partner, it felt extractive, transactional and rooted in white supremacy.

I'm interested in cultivating trust over time. Slowness over urgency. During the last weeks of the cohort sessions I happened to be invited by a community based organization to meet and learn more about the work they're doing. Right now, I'm learning about them and getting to know their work. I have not gotten consent to share what we talk about.

It's not the right time to ask for that or to engage them in a community listening session of this nature. This connection is too new and the focus now is simply on how I can help them. If we become more comfortable with each other in the future, I can refer to the strategies presented in this learning cohort.

Carlee Smith /Community Partner Status

Based on community listening work, we wanted to share their feedback

Community Partner is a employee at a local house of worship that, in-part, helps houseless community members find services and stability as well as works part time in Portland Public Schools with middle to elementary aged children. This community partner interacts regularly with parents, students, non-profits, and unhoused community.

Often feedback or input is asked for, especially through my community partner's work at a local church, but the input isn't reflected back or out into the project process. It feels like efforts are going into a void or dark hole and not acted upon or considered. Having a feedback loop is important during construction or street projects.

My community partner shared that there are many hoops and roadblocks that someone can encounter just to learn about access or ability to apply for programs and assistance. The system is hard to work through, the need for welfare and help is great at the beginning of the month and there are many layers of time, documentation, and effort to access services and to navigate.

Kristin Brown /Community Partner Take Aways

Thanks for your time – any questions?

The People Grow Like Flowers mural by Nia Musiba and Alex Chiu, Central Eastside

Harmonee Dashiell (She/Her)

Community Engagement Strategist

Bureau of Planning and Sustainability

Implementing Feedback and Communicating Changes

Throughout the program, we learned transferable skills to help in our existing engagement work

Top Skills We Learned	How We're Applying it Moving Forward
Being mindful of power dynamics (systems mapping)	Creating comfortable spaces where power can be shared in a collaborative way
Be able to tell the story	Using creative outlets to engage the community. Zines, videos, community news outlets
Communicate out the "why"	Sometimes communicating changes also means communicating the things we couldn't do and /or the reasons behind the actions. Have FAQ

How else do you think we could apply these skills to strengthen our impact in Portland?

Through examining where power sits, we discovered these themes...

…which informed a powerful set of ideas from community members who are seldom heard.

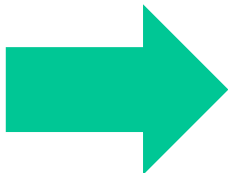**1** *Communication often does not flow equally both directions*

1 *Create clear expectations on communication and multiple avenues of communication for accessibility.*

2 Ideas are often a shared space of power, decision making is less so

"Are you even going to do anything with this work."

2 Give community spaces and opportunities of full autonomy. This is a trust building exercise and a demonstration of commitment.

3 Commitments are sometimes made without noticable follow through

3 Have a consistent feedback loop on process and proper allocations available to get the work done.

Would any community members like to share their experience joining a Community Listening Session and their key takeaways?

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Based on the deep community listening work, we recommend removing barriers for participation by placing a community feedback section on every project page that is a clear listing of what we have heard from community AND responses from staff

WHY
This should be adopted to provide transparency and easy access to the processing of community feedback

HOW
This can be adopted by creating a standard expectation for project and program pages

WHEN
This can be implemented by the new fiscal year by bringing in our communications teams to add the Community Feedback tab to project pages

To begin building trust with the community, we need your buy-in and your hand in accountability.

Thank you for your time!

Do you have any questions?