> " WITHOUT REFLECTION, WE GO BLINDLY ON OUR WAY, CREATING MORE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES, AND FAILING TO ACHIEVE ANYTHING USEFUL. "

– MARGARET J. WHEATLEY
AUTHOR OF LEADERSHIP AND THE NEW SCIENCE

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

"Why do we care?" about community engagement and some key concepts to get started.

Understanding Community Engagement – Section 4.1

- Level of community engagement & degree of public participation (4.1.1)
- Benefits of public engagement (4.1.2)
- Principles of community engagement (4.1.3)
- Scale trust through community engagement (4.1.4)
- Approaches to community engagement (4.1.5)

Planning & Operationalizing Community Engagement – Section 4.2

- Build organizational capacity (4.2.1)
- Required degree of engagement (4.2.2)
- Draft your own community engagement strategy (4.2.3)

Ensuring Meaningful Engagement – Section 4.3

- Engage stakeholders (4.3.1)
- Encourage wider participation (4.3.2)
- Select tools for inclusive engagement (4.3.3)
- Facilitate online engagement (4.3.4)
- Best practices for inclusive engagement (4.3.5)

Check out the resource repository at the end of the section.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

WHY DO WE CARE?

Cities and communities are being more efficient and smarter with data and increased adoption of smart city technologies. As such, the impact of the decisions made by cities and communities on their residents has grown dramatically. Cities and communities that engage and collaborate with representations from the communities create an environment that empowers residents and ensures equitable solutions to public problems.

In recent years, several smart city projects have faced severe public backlash in light of increased fear of government surveillance jeopardizing the trust people place in local governments.[2] Therefore, it is critical for cities and communities to engage, collaborate and empower their residents to ensure that they design people-centric and equitable solutions to public problems.

Community engagement, also referred to as civic engagement, means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and nonpolitical processes.[3]

Most cities undertake passive engagement where they focus only on the minimum legal requirement for engagement.[4] In this section, we provide guidance for active and sustained community engagement efforts. We discuss the following:

1. Understanding Community Engagement

2. Planning and Operationalizing Community Engagement

3. Ensuring Meaningful Community Engagement

4. Community Engagement Resource Repository for Cities and Communities

KEY DEFINITIONS:[1]

- **Community** – People who identify with a defined geographical area, e.g., a council ward, a housing development or a neighborhood. People who share a particular experience, or characteristic such as young people, faith groups, older people, people with disability, migrant groups, community organizations or sporting groups may also identify themselves as a community.

- **Dialogue** – An environment where people gather to talk and to understand each other, cultivate connection and deep learning through discussions on contentious issues.

- **Public Information/Outreach** – One-way communication from the government to the residents informing them about a public problem, issue or policy matter.

- **Public Participation** – Processes through which participants receive new information on the topic/problem at hand and through discussions and deliberations jointly decide on priorities or ideas and/or recommendation to inform decision of local officials.

1 National Environment Research Council. (n.d.). NERC Public Engagement Glossary of terms. National Environment Research Council, U.K. Retrieved April 2021, from https://nerc.ukri.org/about/whatwedo/engage/public/public-engagement-glossary/

2 Rainie, L., & Perrin, A. (2019, July 22). Key findings about Americans' declining trust in government and each other. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/22/key-findings-about-americans-declining-trust-in-government-and-each-other/; What's Fueling the Smart City Backlash? (2019, September 24). Knowledge@Wharton. https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/whats-behind-backlash-smart-cities/

3 Oregon State University. (2021, April 8). What is Community Engagement? https://cel.oregonstate.edu/about/what-community-engagement

4 Institute for Local Government. (2016). Three Orientations of Local Government to Public Engagement. https://www.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/3_orientations_0.pdf?1500481344

4.1. UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

4.1.1 WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT? HOW IS THE DEGREE OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION DEFINED?[5]

The "ladder of citizen participation" is a prominent piece of work by Sherry Arnstein on citizen participation. Each step of the ladder represents a different degree of citizen participation ranging from non-participation to citizen control. Manipulation and therapy aim to dictate the citizens and have no place in a democratic society. Community engagement in a democratic society can be understood in the spectrum of level three – Informing – to level eight – Citizen Control.

The ladder bears close resemblance to the spectrum of public participation developed by International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) that ranges from Inform to Empower, with the former having the least and the latter having the most impact on decision making.

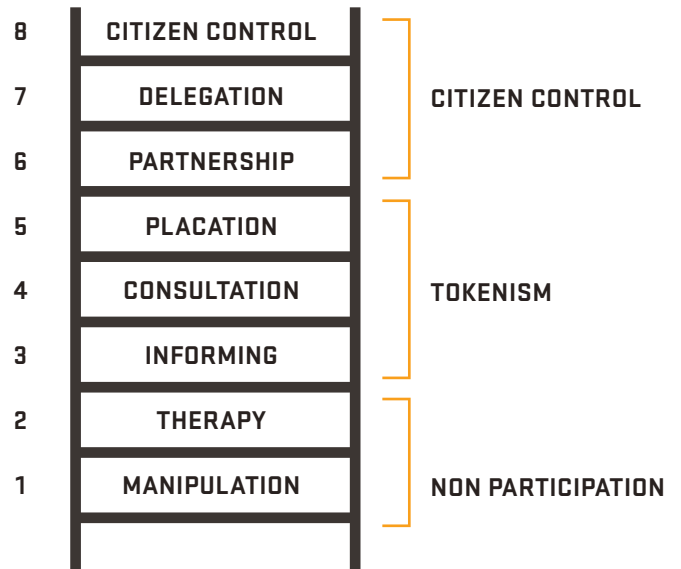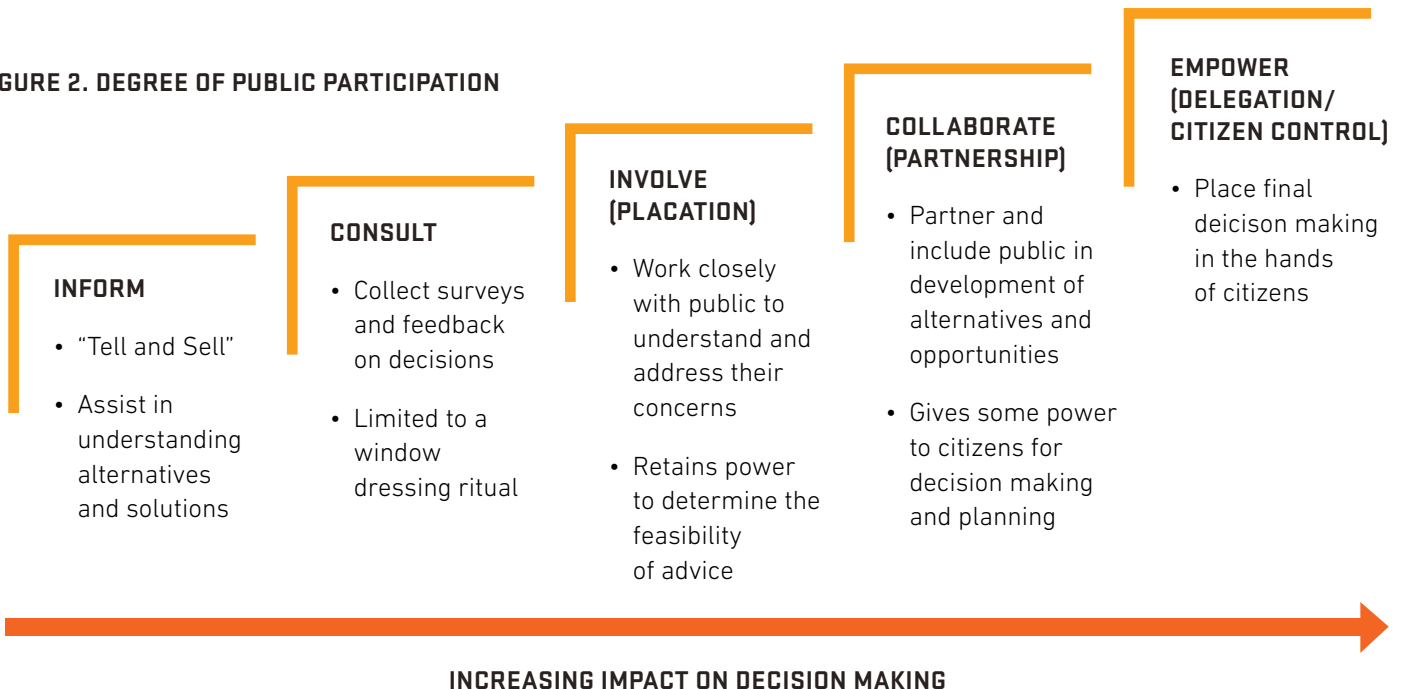**FIGURE 1: DEGREES OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION**
Source: Amstein's Ladder (1969)

FIGURE 2. DEGREE OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

INFORM
- "Tell and Sell"
- Assist in understanding alternatives and solutions

CONSULT
- Collect surveys and feedback on decisions
- Limited to a window dressing ritual

INVOLVE (PLACATION)
- Work closely with public to understand and address their concerns
- Retains power to determine the feasibility of advice

COLLABORATE (PARTNERSHIP)
- Partner and include public in development of alternatives and opportunities
- Gives some power to citizens for decision making and planning

EMPOWER (DELEGATION/ CITIZEN CONTROL)
- Place final deicison making in the hands of citizens

INCREASING IMPACT ON DECISION MAKING

Source: Modified based on IAP2 and Arnstein's Ladder.

5 Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation. (n.d.). The Citizen's Handbook. Retrieved April 2021, from https://citizenshandbook.org/arnsteinsladder.html#collapseInnerTwo

The underlying idea behind the two concepts is that community engagement is a continuum and not a static notion. City and community leaders should decide the degree of citizen participation that is warranted based on the project/policy problem and their organizational capacity (See 2.1 to learn how to build institutional capacity for community engagement and 2.2 for deciding on the degree of participation). Cities and communities should aim to empower residents as they move up the steps from just providing a "Tell and Sell" service. This creates an opportunity for the public to co-create in the planning and decision-making process to support and reach an empowered community that makes decisions in their best interest.

4.1.2 HOW CAN CITIES AND COMMUNITIES' BENEFIT FROM PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT?[6]

"Tell me and I forget, teach me and I learn, involve me and I remember." This quote by Benjamin Franklin illustrates the importance of including residents in the community's decision-making processes. Public engagement is the essence of a democratic society and is essential for establishing transparency and public trust. Cities and communities can benefit from community engagement in the following ways: (i) better identification of resident values and needs; (ii) more informed residents; (iii) improved decision making; (iv) lower risk of public backlash at later stages of implementation; and (v) active community partnership and leadership development. These benefits further generate community buy-in and support.

4.1.3 WHAT ARE THE PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Well defined principles can help to establish a shared vision for engagement with different stakeholders. They are helpful indicators for planning, monitoring, and assessing the overall effectiveness of community engagement. Refer to the principles of Local Government Public Engagement by Institute for Local Government (ILG). The institute offers 10 principles for quality and effective public engagement. NIST's Guide Brief provides a set of key principles for community engagement from different agencies and organizations.

TIP

Collaborating with the community to understand challenges and design solutions, and further empowering people to make decisions is a form of open policy making. The Government of United Kingdom has a comprehensive open policy making toolkit which integrates user-centric design thinking with community engagement.

TIP

For organizing engagement around educational equity and justice refer to these principles.

6 Institute for Local Government. (2016b). What is Public Engagement? & Why Should I do it? https://www.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/ilg_what_is_public_engagement_and_why_should_i_do_it_8.31.16.pdf?1472685794

4.1.4 HOW CAN CITIES AND COMMUNITIES SCALE TRUST THROUGH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Meaningful community engagement requires building trust among individuals and communities. Partnership building with local organizations and communities such as libraries, schools, churches, synagogues, and soup kitchens is a prerequisite for building trustworthiness. Faith-based organizations are a powerful way through which city and community leaders can build trust by proxy. This is because faith is often deeply engrained in the culture and history of a city or community, and it provides a purpose to people to come together celebrate, mourn, reflect, and help each other.[7] Refer to Faith-based Resources for Action from the Asset-Based Community Development Institute.

4.1.5 WHAT APPROACH SHOULD CITIES AND COMMUNITIES TAKE TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Traditional methods of community engagement focus on problems and deficiencies and see residents as victims. This is referred to as the deficit or the "vending machine" model. A problem with this approach is that it assumes a problem that has to be solved and does not include the community in the problem-solving exercise. Unlike the deficit model, the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), or the "barn raising" model views people as assets and focusses on engaging people to find solutions. It is important for cities and communities to "build with" the community and not for the community. Many cities and communities by default operate on the deficit model. For effective community engagement municipalities should move towards an ABCD model. To learn more about the ABCD model refer to this ABCD Talking Points Toolkit.

TIP

Read about the difference between the two models here.

4.2. PLANNING AND OPERATIONALIZING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

4.2.1 HOW CAN WE BUILD ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Community engagement is a massive undertaking and requires a collaborative approach for successful implementation. NIST's guide on Forming a Collaborative Planning Team and Engaging Communities provides guidance on how to build a team and who should be on the team. One lesson the guidance offers is the value of a leader for the municipality's community engagement efforts. This leader should prioritize engagement and establish a municipality's commitment to community engagement. The role can be filled by a civic leader such as a Chief Resilience Officer, a city planner or an emergency management professional. See table 1 of the NIST guide for an example of stakeholders to include on a collaborative planning team.

Cities and communities that do not have in-house expertise or capacity may also hire external consultants to assist in planning and community organizing efforts. Before engaging external public consultants read these tips for working with consultants by ILG.

TIP

- Seattle has a Community Involvement Commission that provides advice on priorities, policies, and strategies for equitable civic engagement and public participation in City decision-making processes.

- New York City has a civic engagement commission responsible for improving civic participation and improving trust.

4.2.2 HOW CAN WE DECIDE WHAT DEGREE OF PARTICIPATION/ ENGAGEMENT IS REQUIRED?

Cities and communities should decide the degree of participation (see 1.1) required based on the impact the decision(s) or the planning process has on the community.

TABLE 1. IMPACT AND DEGREE OF PARTICIPATION

IMPACT	DEGREE OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
High impact on whole community	Collaborate/ Empower
Hight impact on specific group/area	Involve/Collaborate
Moderate impact on whole community	Consult/Involve
Moderate impact on specific group/area	Inform/Consult

Source: Modified based on Community Engagement Toolkit for Planning.

4.2.3 HOW CAN CITIES AND COMMUNITIES DRAFT THEIR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY/PLAN?

You may be tempted to jump right to thinking about tools (see 3.3) for community engagement. However, it is important to first think about the "Why", "Who", "How" and the "What" of the community engagement process. Successful city and community leaders draft community engagement plans and strategize with the following questions in mind: (i) Why community engagement is needed (purpose); (ii) Who should be included (identify stakeholders); (iii) How will we undertake the engagement (implementation, messaging, approaches); and (iv) What we aim to achieve out of the engagement (outcomes, goals). A good example to refer to is West Seattle and Ballard line extensions community engagement guide/plan. You may wish to refer to the following frameworks to draft your own community engagement strategy:

- Five steps for creating a community engagement strategy by Metropolitan Area Planning Council.

- Strategic engagement planning by Future for Privacy Forum geared toward engagement for integrated data systems targeted more towards data privacy.

- Inclusive public engagement plan from Seattle, albeit old (2011), provides steps to design a plan, a list of questions that should be addressed and a checklist.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What is the purpose of this engagement?

- What are the intended goals?

- What tools will be used?

- Who should be included in drafting the plan/strategy?

TIP

- Key questions for local government officials to consider while planning community engagement.

- For Community engagement around open data refer to Tactical Data Engagement and Community Engagement Impact Framework.

4.3. ENSURING MEANINGFUL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

4.3.1 HOW CAN CITIES AND COMMUNITIES ENGAGE THE RIGHT STAKEHOLDERS FOR THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS?

"If you are not at the table, you're on the menu." This anonymous quote highlights the importance of representation. It is critical to carefully engage the right stakeholders and ensure that you have a diverse table of representatives from different sections of the community. The stakeholders will differ based on the project or problem at hand. Some of the hands-on toolkits that can help with stakeholder engagement are:

- Stakeholder understanding checklist by Department of Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning, Queensland Government, Australia – Provides steps and a checklist to engage stakeholders based on their ability to influence outcomes.

- Understanding the playing field by Digital.gov – Provides a checklist, case studies and resources for understanding stakeholder groups.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Who is not included?

- Who will be impacted directly?

- Who will be impacted indirectly?

- How can be verify that all stakeholders have been accounted for?

- Does any particular group or stakeholder have unfair or too much influence/power over the outcome(s)?

4.3.2 WHAT DIFFERENT TYPES OF PEOPLE SHOULD CITIES AND COMMUNITIES ENGAGE AND WHAT CAN BE DONE TO ENCOURAGE WIDE PARTICIPATION?

Each individual is unique. However, the way individuals interact with the municipality and their surroundings may present a pattern that may be common across different people. The table below presents the different types of people local governments interact with as they engage with the community. The list is just a subset of the variety of people one may find in a community.

TABLE 2: TYPES OF RESIDENTS

RESIDENT TYPE	DESCRIPTION
The Advocates	People who are passionate and really want to bring about a positive change in the community. These may be people at non-profits, activists, or even just ordinary residents.
The Non-Believers	People who lack civic sense, who believe that what they do doesn't matter and they can't change or influence anything.
The Unaware	People who lack the realization about if they count or that they can make an impact for instance, immigrants who have come from countries with authoritarian regimes.
The Occupied	People who are very well to do, have a busy life but do not have the time to engage in anything outside of work.

Source: Modified based on Citizen Handbook.

Community engagement is a two-way street. The onus to engage lies on both the municipalities and residents, but more so on municipalities. In some cases where there is a history of mistrust in government, city and community leaders should use extra effort to engage residents. It is important that the community engagement efforts speak to the broader community and nudge people to participate and become more involved. Use different strategies to engage the different types of people listed in the table. Refer to best practices recommended by ILG to engage the broader community.

Cities and communities should make sure that people are encouraged to participate and have accommodation that facilitates equal access and participation in the community engagement efforts. The U.S. Public Participation Playbook provides guidance on how to design participation for inclusiveness and how to provide a multi-tiered path to participation.

TIP

Refer to ILG's tip on increasing access to public meetings and events for:

- People with disability
- Immigrants
- Language Access (I)
- Language Access (II)

Refer to these checklists for engaging:

- Older people
- Younger people
- People with disability
- People from culturally and linguistically diverse background
- Unhoused people

4.3.3 HOW SHOULD CITIES AND COMMUNITIES SELECT TOOLS TO USE FOR INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

One of the key elements for ensuring inclusive community engagement is to be very deliberate about the choice of tools for public meetings, activities, events, and engagements. The choice of tool will depend on the: (i) degree of public participation required; (ii) type of stakeholders; and (iii) purpose and goal of engagement (project specific, problem specific or planning). Use this toolkit to select community engagement tools based on the purpose of engagement. Refer to King County's community guide – it outlines engagement strategies/tools based on the degree and characteristics of engagement.

4.3.4 HOW CAN ONLINE ENGAGEMENT FACILITATE BROADER AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Online engagement helps to reach the masses thus, allowing cities and communities to make a cost-effective and positive impact at scale. A number of local governments use their websites and social media handles to engage and communicate with residents. See this good example of online engagement from Engage Arlington – a project designed to engage residents of Arlington County, Virginia, with different community engagement efforts and initiatives. Cities and communities should actively plan and invest in their online engagement efforts. Refer to this guide by Institute for Local Government (ILG) to plan your online engagement strategies and this brief for examples on using online engagement tools.

TIP

- Read these 10 tips for improving online meetings and learn more about virtual engagement tools here.

- Check out some creative and trending ideas for engagement here.

4.3.5 WHAT ARE THE BEST PRACTICES FOR ENSURING AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

- **Be Clear About Goals and Outcomes** – The very first step to effective community engagement is clearly outlining and documenting the expected achievable goal. This also includes clearly defining the responsibilities of the community engagement team and the resident as well as the potential impact the residents will have on the final decision. For guidance on goal setting, refer to this module by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

- **Expand Community Connections** – Find champions within the society who can actively participate as well as encourage others to get involved. Public institutions such as public libraries, schools and colleges, and faith-based organizations can play a crucial role in spreading awareness and engaging people. Refer to this guide by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council for examples on how to connect with certain groups and brief by Institute for Local Governments (ILG) on expanding community connections.

- **Strategic Communications** – The success of community engagement banks heavily on messaging and communications. Therefore, it is important to ensure clear and transparent communications throughout the community engagement process. Refer to ILG's brief on strategic communications before, during and after beginning a community engagement effort.

- **Be Prepared to Deal with Emotional Behavior** – City and community officials often find themselves in a situation where they have to calmly deal with a disgruntled resident during community meetings and events. It is, therefore, important for officials to be trained in dealing with and diffusing such situations. Refer to this guide on how to respond to negative, emotional, or challenging comments and dealing with disruptive behavior.

- **Follow-up** – Ensure that all questions and concerns that were raised during the engagement are answered. Prepare and publish a summary of your engagement efforts as well as share the findings and next steps. At Array of Things, (Chicago) undertook massive community engagement efforts. Refer to this report summarizing their community engagement efforts.

TIP

Checklist, case studies and resources for transparently reporting outcomes and performance of participation.

- **Improve your Web Transparency** – Most people get information from the city or communities' website or their social media platforms/accounts. Cities and communities should design their web presence to promote transparency and ensure all the information is easily accessible with minimum clicking. Refer to this guidance on improving web transparency and refer to the resource repository for resources on improving your website.

- **Evaluate Success and Effectiveness** – Engaging the community is necessary but not sufficient. Cities and communities should process the gathered information and use it to achieve the desired outcomes. To this end, measuring the success and effectiveness of the community engagement efforts evaluates what worked well and what can be improved in subsequent iterations. Refer to this brief by ILG on measuring the success of public engagement, and use this rapid review worksheet to assess the effectiveness of your engagement.

- **Accept Failures and Shortcomings** – Don't get defensive when someone points out the municipality's past (or current) failings of the municipality. Acknowledge mistakes, make a clear commitment to do better, and focus on people-centric solutions.

4.4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT RESOURCE REPOSITORY FOR CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

NO.	TITLE/ORGANIZATION	LEVEL	WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT TO LEARN?
PROJECT RELATED ENGAGEMENT			
1	A Guidebook to Community Engagement: Involving Urban and Low-Income Populations in an Environmental Planning Process	Intermediate – Advanced	The document provides principles for community engagement, challenges related to engaging low-income residents around two lakes in Flint, Michigan, and step-by-step planning to engage the residents.
COMMUNITY ORGANIZING			
2	The Community Development Handbook – A Tool to Build Community Capacity	Beginners	A comprehensive guide to get started with community engagement. It is divided into five sections that provide guidance on: (i) understanding the basics; (ii) challenges and opportunities; (iii) process behind building community; (iv) attitudes and skills; and (v) common problems and solutions.
3	The Community Development Facilitator's Guide – A Tool to Support Community Development Handbook	Beginners	A document accompanying (2). It provides examples of workshops and exercises, sample agendas, readiness checklist, and other tools required for engaging the community.
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY, GUIDES AND TOOLKITS			
4	Community Engagement Strategy	All	A good example of an engagement strategy. It clearly identifies responsibilities and challenges, what information is needed, who is engaged, who is not reached, how they engage, and what kind of feedback is required.
5	Community Engagement Guidelines and Toolkit	Beginners	The document starts with some the basics of community engagement and introduces a framework to come up with a data engagement strategy. The highlight of this document is it provides templates to think through each of the seven steps suggested by the framework.
6	Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement Guide	Beginners	A comprehensive guide that includes the following: (i) race and social justice implications of community engagement; (ii) strategies for inclusive engagement; (iii) key elements for effective engagement; (iv) worksheet to develop a plan; (v) matrix for engagement to decide tools based on type of engagement; (vi) template for evaluation of engagement; and (vii) glossary of key terms.
7	Community Toolbox	All	A rich resource for a wide range of templates, examples, case studies, and best practices.

NO.	TITLE/ORGANIZATION	LEVEL	WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT TO LEARN?
8	Public Participation Guide	All	A comprehensive guide public participation. The guide offers a wide range of resources, case studies, and self-study modules.
9	A Guide to Community Engagement in Rural and Regional Victoria	All	A standard community guide with best practices for community engagement and an engagement checklist. It is specially written for rural communities.
10	Community Engagement Toolkit	All	This is a unique toolkit as it offers a handful of templates to think through the various aspects on planning and implementing community engagement efforts.
11	Elevated Chicago Community Engagement Principles and Recommendations	All	The document provides eight principles and recommendations for improving community engagement.
12	Stakeholder Mapping Worksheet/ Future of Privacy Forum	All	This two-page worksheet provides the steps, tips and questions to consider in order to identify stakeholders. The worksheet is designed for community engagement for integrated data systems but can be tailored for other use cases.
13	Five Lessons for Tech-Powered Civic Engagement: The Charles Benton Next Generation Engagement Award Playbook	Intermediate – Advanced	The playbook features best practices in civic engagement and digital inclusion. It provides five lessons for community leaders who want to leverage increased access and next-generation technology to scale community engagement initiatives.
MISCELLANEOUS			
14	Style Guides by Government Agencies	All	A repository of style guides used by different U.S. government agencies to communicate with public.
15	Artificial Intelligence (AI): Real Public Engagement	Advanced	A guide to engagement citizen to ensure ethical use of AI.
16	Engage Victoria	All	A list of resources including community engagement framework, strategy, and templates.
17	Racial Equity Tools Community Engagement	All	A rich resource for key sites for community organizing, best practices, and tools.

NO.	TITLE/ORGANIZATION	LEVEL	WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT TO LEARN?
18	Connecting People to Climate Risks	Intermediate – Advanced	A comprehensive toolkit that offers case studies by team and a list of tools to engage the community.
19	International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Values and Code of Ethics	All	IAP2 provides seven core values for the practice of public participation and code of ethics that serve as principles to ensure the integrity of the process.
20	TIERSSM framework	All	The TIERS Public Engagement Learning Lab is an interactive, results-oriented 6-month program led by ILG that provides participants in California local government with hands-on instructions, exclusive TIERS public engagement tools, individualized support of your public engagement project, follow up private consulting, and peer-to-peer learning.