# Potential Building Blocks for Stronger Local Democracy

## Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure

### Potential Building Blocks for Stronger Local Democracy

**BUILDING BLOCKS** | **PRIORITIES THEY CAN HELP ADDRESS** | **POTENTIAL ACTIONS**
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**CREATE SPACES FOR CITIZENS**

| 1. Democratic Spaces in Neighborhoods, Schools and Other Settings | • Inform and educate citizens.  
• Build a stronger sense of community.  
• Tap the power of citizens as problem-solvers.  
• Develop smarter, more widely supported policies.  
• Give marginalized voices a place at the table. | • Work with and support neighborhood councils and associations to help them become more inclusive, participatory and effective.  
• Work with and support school councils and associations to help them become more inclusive, participatory and effective.  
• Help other groups — in faith communities, workplaces, clubs, and other settings — to become more inclusive, participatory and effective, and connect them with other groups and institutions.  
• Connect with online forums (see Building Block 2: Democratic Spaces Online). |

| 2. Democratic Spaces Online | • Inform and educate citizens.  
• Build a stronger sense of community.  
• Develop smarter, more widely supported policies.  
• Support other components. | • Help establish neighborhood/school online forums.  
• Help establish local online forums.  
• Connect online forums with neighborhood and school groups (see Building Block 1: Democratic Spaces in Neighborhoods, Schools and Other Settings). |

| 3. Democratic Spaces for Young People | • Inform and educate citizens.  
• Build a stronger sense of community.  
• Tap the power of citizens as problem-solvers.  
• Develop smarter, more widely supported policies.  
• Give marginalized voices a place at the table. | • Create a city-wide youth council.  
• Help establish other youth engagement programs and activities.  
• Connect with neighborhood, school, and online spaces (see Building Blocks 1 and 2). |

• Support other components. | • Make existing hubs — schools, libraries, community centers, etc. — more available, more welcoming and more widely used.  
• Build or renovate new hubs. |

**BUILD SKILLS AND CAPACITY**

| 5. Engagement Leadership | • Develop smarter, more widely supported policies.  
• Give marginalized voices a place at the table.  
• Support other components. | • Form a city-wide council of engagement leaders.  
• Transform the role of city boards and commissions so that they engage, not just represent.  
• Create a citizens’ academy.  
• Help create or connect with community leadership programs. |

| 6. Public Information Dissemination | • Inform and educate citizens.  
• Support other components. | • Create customizable information systems that allow citizens to sign up for updates on issues and services that interest them.  
• Make more government records available online.  
• Create “serious games” that educate citizens on public issues and services.  
• Create online budget simulators that allow citizens to see the implications of different spending and revenue options.  
• Use barcode technology to provide information on public facilities. |
7. Public Information Dissemination | • Inform and educate citizens.  
• Tap the power of citizens as problem-solvers.  
• Support other components.  
• Provide training for citizens and public employees in skills like recruitment, facilitation, issue framing, meeting design, crowdsourcing, volunteer management, social media management and aggregation, online forum moderation, asset mapping, GPS-based problem-solving, participatory budgeting, serious games and action planning.

8 Tracking, Measurement and Technical Assistance to Improve Engagement | • Tap the power of citizens as problem-solvers.  
• Support other components.  
• Create online processes that allow citizens to help track, measure and assess engagement.  
• Organize a cadre of experienced practitioners who can offer advice and guidance to engagement efforts.

**IMPROVE PUBLIC DECISION-MAKING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING**

9. Official Public Meetings That are More Participatory and Effective | • Build a stronger sense of community.  
• Reduce tension around controversial issues.  
• Develop smarter, more widely supported policies.  
• Give marginalized voices a place at the table.  
• Use more participatory formats for city council, school board, zoning committee and other city meetings (for example, replace “open mic” segments with small-group breakouts, Open Space, Twitterfalls or other interactive exercises).  
• Hold official meetings in places other than the traditional “downtown” locations.  
• Supplement official meetings with separate deliberative processes, either online or face-to-face.

10. Recurring Deliberative Processes on Key Issues and Decisions | • Inform and educate citizens.  
• Build a stronger sense of community.  
• Reduce tension around controversial issues.  
• Tap the power of citizens as problem-solvers.  
• Develop smarter, more widely supported policies.  
• Give marginalized voices a place at the table.  
• Institute an annual Participatory Budgeting process.  
• Mount large-scale community visioning processes at regular intervals.  
• Establish an annual large-scale deliberative process, using face-to-face and online tools, on the top issue of the year.  
• Incorporate deliberative processes in how high-profile land use decisions are made at the local and neighborhood levels.  
• Establish regular deliberations on issues of race, diversity and difference in neighborhoods, workplaces, and other settings.  
• Develop a procedure for using citizen juries, citizen panels or other “representative sample” approaches on more specific or technical issues.

11. Systems That Encourage Innovation by Citizens | • Develop smarter, more widely supported policies.  
• Tap the power of citizens as problem-solvers.  
• Use online crowdsourcing to harvest and prioritize ideas for making progress on a particular issue, or for improving a public service.  
• Use wikis to involve people in creating a shared document or plan.  
• Create a local currency and use it to reward citizens for generating ideas or making other contributions to problem-solving.

12. Cross-Sector Problem-Solving Teams | • Build a stronger sense of community.  
• Tap the power of citizens as problem-solvers.  
• Give marginalized voices a place at the table.  
• Form inter-departmental teams within City Hall — or cross-sector teams including representatives from local government, school systems and other organizations — and assign them to work with different neighborhoods.  
• Establish online GPS-based systems that allow citizens to identify problems such as potholes and graffiti.  
• Provide online workspaces for small groups of citizens and public employees.  
• Create online processes that allow citizens to formulate ideas and then assemble in teams to implement them.