

Engagement Leadership

Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure *BUILDING BLOCK 5 OF 12 – CREATING SPACES FOR CITIZENS*



It is important to uphold and preserve shared leadership of public engagement, since democratic governance ought to be a shared priority and a shared responsibility. Engagement efforts thrive only when citizens trust they are not being co-opted by any particular agenda or interest group, and when a wide range of groups and networks are helping to bring people to the table.

Regional Civic Stewardship

Puget Sound Region, Washington (estimated pop. 3,600,000)

Contact: Jeff Aken, Cascade Agenda Cities Project Manager

(206) 905-6928, jeffa@cascadeland.org, <http://cascadeagenda.com/cities/cascade-agenda-community-stewards>

In the Puget Sound Region, Community Stewards lead networks of active citizens in the development of land use processes that help to save the region's historical and natural character. The Community Stewards Initiative was launched in 2009 by the Cascade Land Conservancy (CLC), one of the Washington's largest land conservation organizations, in cooperation with The Cascade Agenda Cities, a coalition of local public and educational organizations, businesses and individuals. Through these organizations, Community Stewards are provided an organizational structure and communication tools to support project development, including an online forums, technical staff support and training. CLC also works with Community Stewards to support legislation and projects that match the goals of the Cascade Agenda. The Washington Women's Foundation awarded the program an \$87,500 grant to fund programs and projects. The Community Stewards are at work in several communities. In 2009, Citizens in Tacoma took action after participating in a local land use planning process and developed campaigns to improve their city's livability and environment. In Tukwila, residents developed campaign strategies to help St. Thomas Parish start a new community garden. The garden serves refugee families from Burma and Bhutan, and provides food for the church's food bank. By partnering with local organizations, the residents of Edmonds and Shoreline are developing "complete streets" that promote non-motorized transportation.

PRIORITIES TO ADDRESS:

- Develop smarter, more widely supported policies.
- Give marginalized voices a place at the table.
- Support other components.

POTENTIAL ACTIONS:

- 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.
- Ensure that a wide range of people, reflecting the full diversity of the community, are serving in leadership roles and participating in leadership training opportunities.

WORK BEST WHEN:

- They bring together people who have been doing public engagement work on different issues or in different arenas.
- They represent a broad array of groups and organizations in the community.
- The process for appointing or electing members is transparent and fair.
- Each participant brings resources and commitments to the table, rather than relying on government or any other institution to be the sole implementer of new policies and initiatives.
- Councils, boards and commissions have online platforms that allow them to interact regularly with their constituencies.
- Members have or learn the skills to recruit members, facilitate discussions and design meetings.
- Participants can rely on other groups, such as neighborhood associations or civic groups, to help them convene residents.
- Councils, boards and commissions have some regular, legitimate role in local policymaking.