

Tracking, Measurement and Technical Assistance to Improve Engagement

Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure *BUILDING BLOCK 8 OF 12 - BUILDING SKILLS AND CAPACITY*



Assessment to Improve Engagement

Portland, Oregon (pop. 583,000)

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To be successful in democratic governance, cities need to be able to adapt on the fly, bring in experienced advisors when needed and learn from what is working — and what isn't. These traits aren't usually "planned in" to the way communities approach this work, but they could be. Tracking process data like turnout, demographics and participant satisfaction, and making that information publicly available online, can help organizers and participants measure the quality of engagement efforts and decide how to improve them. Most cities don't gather this information, and most lack a well-known and easy-to-access cadre of experienced practitioners who can provide advice and technical assistance to people in different organizations who are working to engage the public.

The City of Portland maintains a performance measurement system for the city's system of neighborhood associations and district coalition offices. It tracks some of the basic factors in neighborhood organizing, including the number of people attending meetings and events, the frequency and kind of communications going out to residents and partnerships with other community groups. The city auditor also administers an annual community survey that includes questions about public participation and whether residents feel they can have an effect on decision-making. Finally, the city's Public Involvement Advisory Council, an ongoing formal body that is comprised of city staff and community members, has begun to play a proactive role in evaluating public involvement by city officials and staff, and suggesting improvements.

PRIORITIES TO ADDRESS:

- Tap the power of citizens as problem-solvers.
- Support other components.

POTENTIAL ACTIONS:

- Formulate a set of indicators and benchmarks that can be used to track and measure engagement processes.
- Create an online dashboard for each process, or for the community as a whole, using engagement indicators.
- Organize a cadre of experienced practitioners who can offer advice and guidance to engagement efforts.

WORK BEST WHEN:

- They enlist citizens in providing some of the data on engagement efforts, and helping to analyze the results.
- The information being gathered includes data on the race, gender, age and income level of participants, so that it is possible to see whether participants in meetings or other engagement opportunities are representative of the broader community.
- There is some sort of city-wide body whose job it is to monitor and support this continual reporting and assessment process.