



Equitable Engagement Report

2025 Guide to Advancing Equitable Engagement Practices

Prepared by Social Pinpoint, this report offers strategies, insights, and best practices for promoting inclusive and equitable community engagement.

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Executive Summary

In June 2024, the "Engaging for Equity" survey—in collaboration with IAP2 Australasia, Municipal World, the National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD), Social Pinpoint, and the Transportation Research Board (TRB)—collected insights from 601 respondents globally. The survey examined the evolving role of community engagement in promoting equity, shedding light on key challenges and advancements in the field.

This report presents the survey results, offering practical strategies, tools, and case studies to help practitioners foster equitable engagement and drive meaningful change.

Key Takeaways

The Importance of Equitable Engagement

Equitable community engagement is fundamental to addressing systemic inequities and ensuring that every community member has the opportunity to influence decisions that affect their lives. Meaningful engagement with marginalized groups requires deliberate efforts to build trust, remove barriers to participation, and actively seek diverse perspectives that might otherwise be excluded.

Strategies and Tools for Inclusive Engagement

Effective engagement requires a combination of thoughtful strategies and the right tools. This report offers practical resources and case studies to inspire practitioners to implement intentional, inclusive engagement strategies.

Measuring Success

Equitable engagement is measured by its impact, not just effort. This involves analyzing demographic data, tracking engagement patterns, and adjusting strategies based on insights. Regular evaluation ensures inclusive representation and effective outreach that reflects participants' needs.

Taking Action

To engage marginalized communities, organizations must take targeted actions such as adapting outreach methods, providing accessible materials, and building community partnerships. This report outlines actionable steps to strengthen relationships and ensure sustainable, impactful engagement.

Our intention is for this report to serve as a **comprehensive resource for organizations dedicated to advancing their community engagement efforts**. By adopting these strategies and utilizing the right tools, practitioners can create initiatives that are not only inclusive but also impactful and effective. Ultimately, these efforts aim to drive more equitable decision-making processes and build stronger, more connected communities.

SECTION 1

Introduction

This section explores the core principles of equitable engagement, its importance in fostering inclusive communities, and the evolving landscape of community engagement.

Equitable Engagement: Beyond The Buzzword

Equitable engagement is the cornerstone of genuine public service. It goes beyond being a buzzword by ensuring that all voices—especially those historically excluded or marginalized—are included in shaping decisions that affect their lives.

Why It Matters

- **Addressing power imbalances:** Recognizes and confronts systemic biases.
- **Hearing uncomfortable truths:** Encourages difficult but necessary conversations.
- **Preventing inequities:** Mitigates the risk of perpetuating systemic barriers.
- **Fostering trust:** Builds resilient, inclusive communities.

Without this commitment, policies risk serving only the loudest or most privileged voices.

Practitioners have a duty to:

- Meet communities where they are,
- Adapt to unique needs, and
- Make inclusion the starting point—not an afterthought.

The Challenges

- **No one-size-fits-all:** Every community and project requires tailored strategies.
- **Relationship building takes time:** Engagement must extend beyond transactional, project-based interactions to foster genuine, long-term connections.
- **Resource-intensive:** Success demands sustained effort, resources, and commitment.

The Outcome

Stronger policies and investments that aim to reduce inequities by addressing the greatest unmet needs, fostering more inclusive and equitable outcomes for all.



Industry Changes in Community Engagement

In recent years, community engagement has undergone significant transformation, shaped by emerging technologies, shifting societal expectations, and the need for more inclusive and responsive practices. These evolving trends are redefining how organizations connect with and empower communities:

Shift to Online Engagement

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the use of digital tools, showing organizations the potential of online platforms for more inclusive and accessible engagement.

Hybrid Engagement Models

Combining digital and in-person methods has become a standard approach, offering the flexibility and accessibility needed to engage diverse perspectives, accommodate varying schedules, and reach broader, more inclusive audiences.

Community-Led Approaches and Placemaking

Engagement has shifted from top-down models to resident-driven participation, encouraging stronger ownership and active involvement in shaping initiatives and policies.

Increased Focus on Inclusive Practices

Organizations are prioritizing both physical and digital environments that cater to diverse needs, ensuring meaningful participation for all.

Ongoing Engagement and Feedback Loops

One-time consultations are giving way to continuous dialogue, emphasizing regular feedback loops and ongoing community involvement to build lasting trust and accountability.

Adoption of Emerging Technologies

Technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality (VR), and augmented reality (AR) are transforming engagement by making it more interactive, inclusive, and data-driven, enhancing both participation and outcomes.

Demand for Transparency

Communities are increasingly demanding to see how their feedback influences decisions, prompting organizations to be more open about their decision-making processes and the impacts of public input.

SECTION 2

Survey Results

This section presents key findings from the "Engaging for Equity" survey, including data on respondents, organizational motivation, and the current state of engagement.

Survey Overview

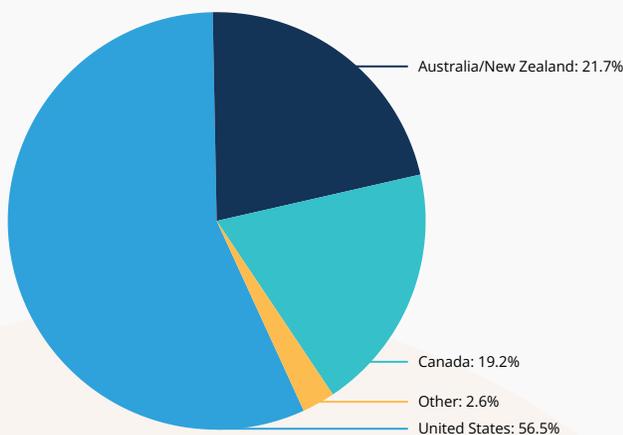
The "Engaging for Equity" survey was designed to gain insights into the current state of community engagement and equity efforts across various regions and sectors. It included **eight core questions that focused on key themes such as organizational motivation, engagement practices, challenges, and successes in achieving equity**. Additionally, the survey asked **three background questions to gather information on respondents' roles, the types of organizations they represent, and the regions where they practice engagement**. These questions were designed to help us better understand the context in which engagement practices are taking place and how equity is being prioritized across different settings.

We also asked respondents to share examples of successful inclusive engagement practices by checking a box if they were willing to contribute. Some of these stories are featured in this report to provide practical examples and inspire others.

In total, the survey received **601 contributions** from practitioners across the globe, offering valuable perspectives on the ongoing efforts to create more equitable and inclusive community engagement.

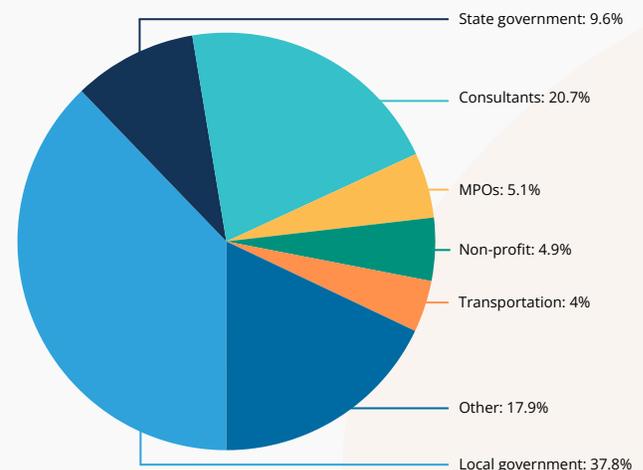
Geographical Representation

Respondents came from a wide range of regions, with the **majority (57%) from the United States**. A significant portion also came from Australia and New Zealand (22%), while 19% were based in Canada. The remaining responses came from Europe, the United Kingdom, Africa, and Asia.



Respondent Demographics

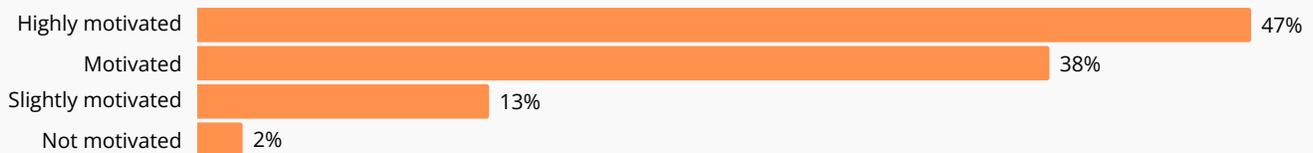
A diverse group of professionals participated, including **38% local government employees**, **21% consultants**, and others from sectors such as state government, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), non-profits, transportation agencies, and healthcare.



Organizational Motivation

It's important to note that surveys like these can introduce confirmation bias, as respondents are often current practitioners with expertise in strategies and successful practices for addressing equity. As a result, the respondents are likely to come from organizations with a strong commitment to inclusivity and diversity in engagement. Consequently, the survey responses may overrepresent organizations that are highly motivated or successful in these areas.

With that context in mind, **85% of respondents indicated that their organization is either motivated or highly motivated to make engagement inclusive, diverse, and representative.**



When comparing responses across the three largest regions, Canada had the highest percentage of respondents reporting that their organizations were only 'slightly motivated' or 'not motivated.' The 'United States had a slightly larger percentage of 'highly motivated' responses. Australia and New Zealand had the largest combined share of respondents who indicated their organizations were either 'motivated' or 'highly motivated.'

Current Engagement Practices

Respondents rated the statement, '**My organization's current community engagement is inclusive and diverse,**' on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being 'strongly disagree' and 10 being 'strongly agree.' The **average score was 6.54**, just above neutral, with the most common response being 7.

Just over **30%** of respondents rated their organization's engagement practices between 0 and 5, highlighting that many practitioners see opportunities for improvement in inclusivity and diversity.

Motivation Reflection

How would you rate your organization's commitment to improving inclusivity and diversity in engagement? Write down any key initiatives, policies, or leadership efforts that support your rating, and identify areas for improvement.

SECTION 3

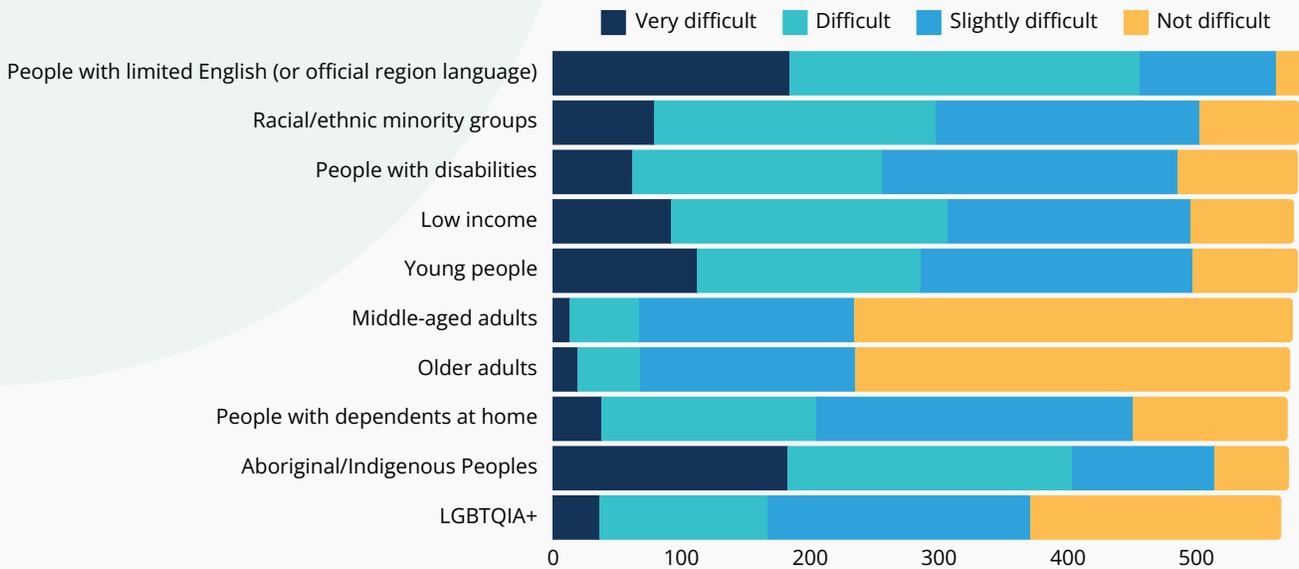
Barriers to Equitable Engagement

This section explores historically underrepresented demographic groups in public engagement, highlighting the challenges faced by both participants and practitioners.

Traditionally Underrepresented Groups

Understanding which demographic groups have been historically underrepresented in public engagement and decision-making is key to developing strategies and tools to include these communities

The survey asked respondents, 'Which traditionally underrepresented groups are most difficult to engage?' offering 10 predefined options, with an additional text field for further input.



Most Underrepresented Groups Identified

- People with limited English proficiency or regional language skills.
- Aboriginal or Indigenous Peoples.
- Young people and low-income groups were also highlighted as difficult to engage.

Other Underrepresented Groups Frequently Mentioned

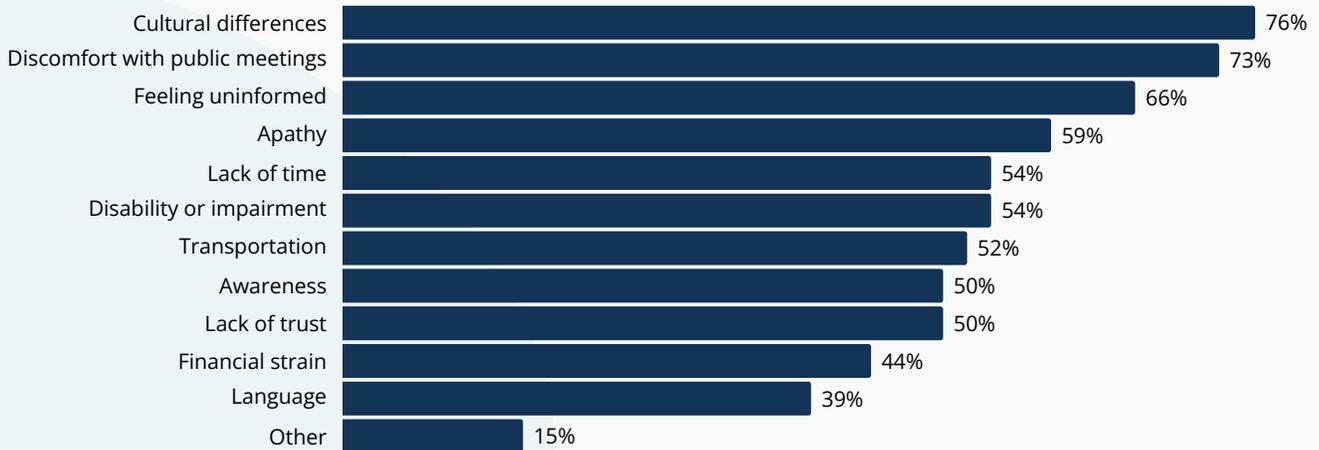
Through the additional text field for open-ended responses, several other underrepresented groups were mentioned, as illustrated in the word cloud below.



Barriers for Participants

Survey respondents were asked, 'Which barriers impact participation for traditionally underrepresented audiences in your community?' They could choose from 11 predefined options and provide additional input in a text field to specify any unlisted barriers.

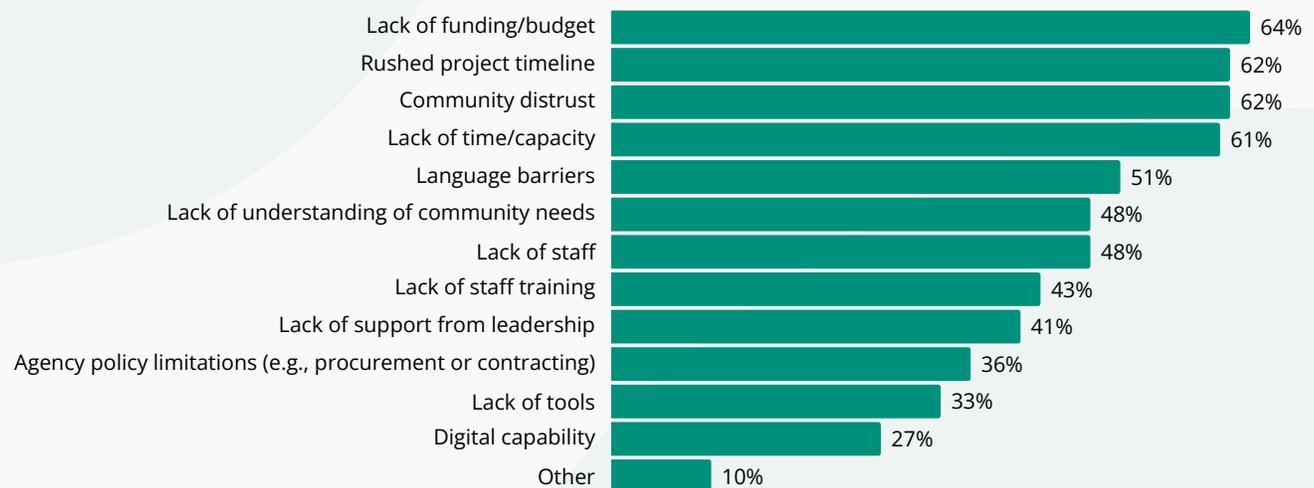
The most significant barrier identified was **distrust in governing bodies**, followed by **lack of time** and **lack of awareness** about engagement opportunities.



Barriers for Practitioners

Practitioners were asked to identify the challenges they encounter when engaging traditionally underrepresented audiences in their communities. The survey provided 12 predefined options, along with a text field for additional input to capture unlisted obstacles.

Lack of funding emerged as the most significant barrier, followed by **tight deadlines** and **community distrust**, making it difficult to foster meaningful and sustained engagement efforts.



SECTION 4

Strategies & Tools

This section outlines effective strategies and tools for promoting inclusive engagement and connecting with communities that have historically been underrepresented.

Co-Designing Engagement

Co-designing public engagement with residents and community leaders is a **collaborative approach that empowers those who know their communities best to shape communication and decision-making.**

This collaboration between local governments and community members allows both parties to co-create the structure and content of engagement efforts, ensuring they are not only meaningful and accessible but also truly aligned with the unique needs and values of the community. This approach proves especially effective in addressing complex issues that impact various groups, as it promotes a deeper, more nuanced understanding of diverse perspectives and experiences.

By involving community members in the design process, engagement methods become more inclusive and culturally sensitive, increasing participation and fostering greater trust. Residents who contribute to shaping the process feel a sense of ownership, which strengthens the relationship between the public and their government, resulting in more authentic and lasting engagement.

Co-design also **drives innovative solutions by merging the expertise of public officials with the lived experiences of community members,** uncovering insights that might otherwise be overlooked. This collaboration enhances both the effectiveness of engagement efforts and the policies they inform, ensuring they are more responsive to community needs. Ultimately, this approach cultivates more responsive, democratic governance and fosters stronger, more sustainable community relationships.

Effective Strategies for Co-Designing Engagement

- **Shared decision-making committees/panels:** Establish a diverse advisory group of community members to co-create project goals, strategies, and deliverables. This ensures the engagement process reflects the needs and priorities of those directly affected by the project.
- **Participatory budgeting:** Involve community members in the allocation of portions of the project budget through a transparent, collaborative decision-making process.
- **Community-led workshops:** Organize planning sessions where residents collaborate with staff to design outreach materials and activities. When community members are compensated for their time and expertise, consider having them facilitate discussions and activities.
- **Community engagement review:** Conduct annual reviews with the community to assess effectiveness, including surveys and feedback sessions.

Insights from Elizabeth Gish, Kettering Foundation

Elizabeth Gish emphasized that **co-designing engagement starts by meeting communities where they are** and respecting their knowledge, goals, and values. Key practices include prioritizing dialogue to build trust, supporting existing efforts, compensating community contributions, and being transparent about public input.

These principles promote a collaborative approach rooted in community culture. Gish noted that every community has healers and leaders, and empowering them to lead or facilitate engagement can strengthen connections and lead to more sustainable outcomes.

Pop-Ups / “Go to Them” Approach

The "pop-up" or "go to them" approach **brings public engagement to where people naturally gather**—such as parks, libraries, transit hubs, shopping centers, and farmers' markets. By integrating outreach into everyday spaces and events, this method fosters inclusivity and draws a diverse cross-section of the community. It also **reduces barriers like time, transportation, and lack of awareness**, while offering informal, approachable interactions that encourage authentic conversations.

However, it's important to recognize that while this approach can increase participation, it may not always reach the most impacted groups. A larger number of participants doesn't necessarily reflect their representativeness. It's essential to consider the spaces and events frequented by the communities most affected by your project and make a concerted effort to engage them within your timeline.

Examples of Community Spaces to Reach People

- **Libraries:** Partner with staff to display surveys or use project content on public computers.
- **Transit stops:** Engage while people wait or ride along.
- **Neighborhood meetings or community events:** Attend neighborhood gatherings or celebrations to meet residents in their space.
- **Playgrounds and parks:** Set up near youth sports games or play areas to connect with families.
- **Dog parks:** Similar to playgrounds, set up at local dog parks to engage pet owners.
- **Barbershops/hair salons:** Partner with owners to host informal discussions or distribute materials.
- **Gyms/fitness centers:** Catch people in lobbies or after classes during everyday routines.
- **School events:** Engage parents and students at community-oriented school functions.
- **Grocery stores:** Set up near entrances to reach people during their weekly errands.
- **Cafes:** Take advantage of morning coffee routines by asking questions while people wait.
- **Sports clubs:** Engage with a diverse range of sports fans and participants at all levels, from local leagues to professional teams.

If you're setting up a pop-up in a privately owned venue, **make sure to secure permission and support from key individuals or groups beforehand.** Starting on the right foot helps build positive relationships, prevents potential misunderstandings, and sets the stage for a successful engagement.



Pop-Up Brainstorm

Take a moment to brainstorm: What local spots in your community could serve as great pop-up engagement locations?

Compensating Community Members

Compensating community members for their involvement in public engagement work acknowledges the time, expertise, and lived experiences they bring to the process. Payment demonstrates respect for their contributions, fostering a more equitable engagement process and ensuring a broader range of voices—especially from marginalized communities—are represented.

There are various approaches to securing resources for compensation, such as incorporating community stipends into project budgets, applying for grants from government agencies, nonprofits, or foundations focused on civic participation, and partnering with local businesses or philanthropic organizations for financial or in-kind support.

In some cases, cities and nonprofits establish discretionary funds or dedicated community engagement budgets to ensure consistent compensation across projects. These methods underscore the importance of community input, making participation accessible to a wider range of residents who might otherwise face financial barriers to involvement.

Approaches to Compensation

- **Honoraria:** Provide stipends for community leaders or residents participating in focus groups or planning sessions.
- **Covering out-of-pocket expenses:** Address transportation and caregiving costs, which are significant barriers to participation, by covering these expenses or providing services as part of the process.
- **Gift cards:** Offer grocery or transit gift cards for attending workshops or completing surveys.
- **Creative contracting:** If project funding allows, consider bringing on sub-consultants to help navigate procurement challenges and pay community members directly.

Compensation is a sensitive subject, so it's essential to discuss any approach with community leaders before committing funds. For more information on compensating public participation, visit our blog on the topic: <https://www.socialpinpoint.com/compensating-community-participation>.

Case Study: Delaware County's Vision Zero Plan

Catherine Spahr, a planner with the Delaware County Planning Department, shared her experience from the Vision Zero project, which aimed to improve traffic safety by involving community members in the engagement process.

As part of the Safety Ambassador Program, participants received a \$1,000 stipend in two installments via gift cards. This approach recognized their time and expertise, fostering a sense of value and commitment, and strengthening community involvement throughout the project.

Partnerships with Community Organizations

Partnering with community organizations for public involvement is a **powerful strategy to expand outreach and build trust within diverse populations**. These organizations often have **deep-rooted connections and a profound understanding of the communities they serve**, making them essential partners in engagement efforts.

By collaborating with these organizations, local governments can **leverage established relationships** and communication channels to reach residents who may be unfamiliar with or skeptical of formal government processes. Community organizations also **provide cultural context, language support, and resources**, ensuring engagement methods are accessible and meaningful. This collaboration helps reduce barriers to participation and ensures that engagement efforts resonate with the community.

Furthermore, these partnerships promote a more inclusive and responsive engagement environment by amplifying underrepresented voices and tailoring outreach to the unique needs of different communities. This collaborative approach strengthens public involvement and contributes to building a more inclusive, resilient civic infrastructure.

Engagement Strategy Examples

- **Co-hosted workshops:** Partner with local non-profits to design and deliver culturally relevant events that encourage community participation and input.
- **Leveraging trusted networks:** Collaborate with faith-based organizations and other community groups to share project information through their established communication channels.
- **Community ambassadors:** Work with grassroots organizations to train and support residents as liaisons who can connect with their peers and gather feedback.
- **Co-created materials:** Partner with local language groups to translate project documents. This ensures accurate language nuances from native speakers and helps spread the message organically within the community, as they share it with friends and family.

Case Study: Northern Beaches Council

Northern Beaches Council takes a proactive approach to engagement by **focusing on capacity building and fostering lasting partnerships with often overlooked community groups**. Through the development of a **Multicultural Inclusion Plan**, the Council strengthened connections with diverse communities by partnering with cultural leaders, translating materials into six languages, and offering in-language translation services during consultations. Targeted advertising through multicultural social media raised awareness and encouraged participation, resulting in over 130 submissions, 57% of which came from people identifying as culturally and linguistically diverse.

To learn more, read the full case study: <https://www.socialpinpoint.com/case-studies/northern-beaches-inclusion-plan-engages-multicultural-communities/>.

Social Media

Social media platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, and X (formerly Twitter) are **widely used tools that enable organizations to engage with their communities, share updates, and disseminate information in real time.** Beyond broadcasting messages, these platforms offer **powerful, data-driven targeting capabilities**, such as audience segmentation by demographics and location, allowing organizations to tailor messages to specific groups. Paid advertising further extends the reach of these messages, ensuring they are delivered to the right people at the right time.

Impactful Social Media Tactics

- **Partner with trusted messengers:** Collaborate with local influencers, community leaders, or organizations to share your message. Content delivered by familiar and trusted voices typically generates higher engagement than agency-led posts.
- **Use geo-targeting tools:** Platforms like Facebook and Instagram allow you to target ads to specific zip codes or regions, ensuring your campaigns reach communities most impacted by your project or initiative. Keep track of past participants and re-engage relevant groups for future projects—always with consent to contact them again. Consider whether using a relationship management tool could enhance your ability to track and re-engage past participants for future projects.
- **Tailor content for relevance:** Create variations of your message that resonate with the values, concerns, and language of different groups to make the content more relatable and impactful.
- **Invest in paid promotions:** Boost posts or run ad campaigns to extend your reach. Use audience segmentation tools to target groups most likely to engage with your message.
- **Work with platform algorithms:** Encourage likes, shares, and comments by creating content that invites interaction. Higher engagement increases visibility, as platforms prioritize active posts. Use social media to identify community members, then direct them to other spaces—such as online surveys or digital engagement platforms—where they can provide feedback and participate in community discussions.
- **Provide multilingual content:** Offer posts and ads in the languages spoken within your community. Use language segmentation tools to ensure the correct version reaches the intended audience.

Social Media Brainstorm

Take a moment to brainstorm: How are you currently communicating with community members about upcoming engagements, and how could you use social media more effectively or creatively?

Engage Internally

Equitable public engagement begins long before engaging the public. It **starts with cultivating an internal culture that values public feedback and prioritizes equitable engagement practices.**

Before implementing strategies, it's essential to **first define organizational values and engagement priorities**, ensuring that there is a shared understanding of why this work is crucial. Establishing clear goals and principles that align with a commitment to equity creates the foundation for meaningful action.

Leadership is essential in driving this cultural shift. It's not enough for leaders to simply support the idea of diverse engagement; they must actively champion the actions needed to achieve it. Leaders who are committed to equitable engagement provide necessary resources, offer training, and ensure organizational accountability, creating an environment that nurtures equitable practices across all levels.

Effective internal engagement also requires **creating spaces where staff can engage with one another and share experiences, challenges, and successes.** Encouraging cross-departmental collaboration and open discussions on engagement practices will build a stronger, more cohesive organization that is better equipped to serve diverse communities.

Strategies for Promoting Engagement Internally

- **Clear engagement goals:** Set clear, actionable goals for engagement that have the support of both staff and leadership.
- **Reflection and evaluation:** Dedicate time for reflection on the effectiveness of engagement efforts at the organizational level.
- **Staff feedback and satisfaction:** Regularly gather and analyze data on staff satisfaction with their community engagement roles and responsibilities.
- **Ongoing training and development:** Offer continuous learning opportunities, providing staff with resources and training on the latest engagement best practices.
- **Diversity and inclusion policies:** Develop and implement policies that support a culture of diversity and inclusion within the organization.

Internal Culture Brainstorm

Take a moment to brainstorm: What resources would help your organization cultivate a culture that actively values public feedback and fosters equitable engagement strategies.

Engage Intentionally

Intentional public engagement requires clarity about the purpose of soliciting feedback and its role in decision-making. **Being transparent about the "why" behind the engagement fosters trust and ensures participants understand their influence.**

While it's important to encourage creative input, it's equally valuable to set clear boundaries about what can or cannot be addressed within the scope of the project. Acknowledge ideas that may not be immediately actionable, as they could inform future efforts or work in other areas.

Whether the goal is to inform, gather input, or co-create, **clear communication about intent helps manage expectations and prevents frustration.** When facilitators explain how feedback will influence decisions—whether it shapes recommendations, narrows options, or directly impacts outcomes—they respect participants' time and insights. This transparency ensures that input is relevant and constructive, demonstrating accountability and reinforcing the legitimacy of the process.

Key Principles for Intentional Engagement

- **Proactively answer "why":** Provide a clear explanation of why people should participate in feedback opportunities, such as an FAQ or dedicated messaging. Explaining the importance of their input helps build a sense of ownership and demonstrates that their voices matter.
- **Show a clear connection:** Demonstrate how public feedback influenced the initial project funding and how each engagement phase will shape the final deliverable.
- **Educate about limitations:** Communicate any policies or restrictions that impact the feasibility of certain outcomes. Participants may not be happy about unmet expectations, but they will appreciate understanding the broader context.
- **Clarify what's negotiable:** Clearly communicate upfront what aspects of the project are open to change and which are not. Setting these boundaries helps manage expectations and ensures that participants understand the limitations.
- **Report back transparently:** Follow up with participants to show how their input has influenced project outcomes. Consider providing an engagement report or newsletter to keep the community informed of final decisions and their contributions.

Insights from Kirby Date, KM Date Community Planning

Kirby Date emphasized that intentional public engagement requires understanding community demographics, tailoring outreach strategies, and building trust through thoughtful design and execution. Key strategies include assessing demographics to prioritize underserved groups, using diverse outreach methods, and partnering with trusted leaders for effective discussions. Leveraging existing structures to maximize capacity, budgeting for equity through support like childcare or compensation, and fostering trust by clearly communicating the purpose of feedback and its role in decision-making are also essential for successful engagement.

Language Access

Providing language access in both in-person and online engagement is crucial for ensuring all community members can participate meaningfully, regardless of language proficiency.

For in-person events, consider offering **interpretation services in the community's primary languages** and providing **translated materials** like handouts, signs, and guides. Trained interpreters can facilitate discussions while being mindful of cultural nuances and communication styles. To ensure effective translation, position interpreters where they are easily visible and avoid spaces with poor acoustics. In multilingual communities, creating language-specific breakout groups or using alternative communication methods like visual aids can further promote inclusivity.

For digital engagement, **live interpretation and translated content on surveys, websites, and social media** help ensure equitable participation. While automated tools such as translation software can assist, combining them with human oversight guarantees accuracy and cultural relevance.

Best Practices for Multilingual Engagement

- **Real-time interpretation:** Offer live translation at meetings to ensure all participants can follow along in real time.
- **Language-specific outreach:** Host focus groups, webinars, or virtual meetings in the native languages of target communities to make it easy for community members to engage and provide input.
- **Culturally relevant messaging:** Incorporate culturally specific idioms, visuals, and communication styles in outreach materials.
- **Language-specific breakout groups:** Create smaller, language-specific groups during meetings or events to encourage more in-depth discussions.
- **Alternative engagement methods:** Explore visual or non-verbal communication techniques to support individuals with limited language proficiency.
- **Optimized event setup:** Ensure that interpreters are positioned in a way that they are easily visible to participants, and that the event environment is conducive to effective translation.
- **Online language access:** For virtual events, offer live interpretation and ensure that all digital content, such as surveys, websites, and social media posts, are translated.

Case Study: Glen Eira City Council

Glen Eira City Council provides a great example of inclusivity through its 'Our Priorities, Our Future' initiative, utilizing a variety of engagement methods to reach diverse demographics, including a drawing activity for children, paper surveys, an online survey, and more. The Council also hosted sessions for multicultural communities and created a Community Priorities Panel, which resulted in 1,755 survey responses.

To learn more, read the full case study: <https://www.socialpinpoint.com/case-studies/glen-eira-understanding-community-priorities-for-a-better-future/>.

Hybrid Engagement

Participants now expect a hybrid engagement approach that **blends in-person and online formats**, offering flexibility to engage according to their preferences, availability, and circumstances. This approach helps **overcome common barriers to participation, such as time constraints, geographic distance, and accessibility challenges**, enabling broader and more inclusive community participation.

For example, a local council could host an in-person town hall meeting and offer an online survey or live-streamed session for those unable to attend. By providing multiple options, this model ensures equal representation and **allows individuals to participate in the way that works best for them**.

Strategies for Effective Hybrid Engagement

- **Synchronous vs. asynchronous:** Decide whether engagement will occur simultaneously (synchronously) or at different times (asynchronously). Synchronous engagement allows real-time interaction, while asynchronous engagement offers flexibility for participants to contribute at their convenience. Consider your audience's availability and the need for real-time dialogue to determine the best approach, ensuring equal participation for both in-person and online attendees.
- **Clear communication of participation options:** Clearly communicate the available engagement options ahead of time (in-person, virtual, or both) to ensure participants understand how they can contribute. This might include instructions on how to join a virtual session, access surveys, or participate in live chats.
- **Equal access to information:** In-person and virtual participants should receive the same content, including discussion points, visual aids, and materials. Adapt materials, such as charts or diagrams, to ensure both groups can fully access and understand the information shared.
- **Post-event engagement:** Record in-person events and offer online feedback options to extend engagement. This allows those who couldn't attend live events to contribute, revisit materials, and provide feedback at their convenience, ensuring broader participation and more thoughtful input.

Case Study: City of Port Adelaide Enfield

The City of Port Adelaide Enfield (PAE) offers **diverse engagement methods to meet the needs of its residents**, including an online platform in 15 languages, hard copy feedback options, and various online tools for easy access. PAE's 'Shaping Inclusion' initiative gives people with disabilities, or those supporting someone with a disability, a voice in shaping the community's future.

Working with staff and community members, PAE identified improvements and implemented solutions through inclusive online and offline methods. Using Social Pinpoint's tools, residents interacted via Q&A, Forum, Gather, and Social Map, addressing topics like infrastructure needs. The City also hosted hybrid workshops and feedback sessions for broad participation.

To learn more, read the full case study: <https://www.socialpinpoint.com/case-studies/pae-promotes-inclusivity-through-hybrid-engagement/>.

Storytelling and Creativity

Storytelling and creative expression are **powerful tools for enhancing community engagement, building trust, and amplifying voices that have often been underrepresented in public involvement processes.** By connecting with the collective narratives of a community, these strategies **humanize complex issues, foster empathy, and inspire more widespread participation.**

Creative approaches also help bring the issues that matter most to residents into sharper focus, while providing tangible, interactive ways for them to engage with a project and its long-term impact. Furthermore, these methods **create a lasting, emotional connection that strengthens community bonds** and ensures that the voices of diverse groups are not just heard but valued.

Ways to Incorporate Storytelling and Creativity into Community Engagement

- **Community art installations:** Collaborate with local artists and residents to create murals, sculptures, or other public art that reflect community values, history, and aspirations. These installations serve as lasting symbols of the engagement process, visually representing the community's vision and making it accessible to all.
- **Digital storytelling projects:** Use modern media tools, such as videos, podcasts, or blog posts, to collect and share the stories of community members. These digital formats make personal stories easily accessible to a broader audience, helping to amplify voices that may otherwise be overlooked.
- **Interactive maps or visuals:** Leverage tools like story maps, interactive maps, or data visualization platforms to present community data, historical narratives, or proposed changes in an engaging, easy-to-understand way. These tools encourage deeper community participation and enhance understanding by visually presenting important information.
- **Community-based performances or workshops:** Organize live performances, theater productions, or interactive workshops that allow residents to express their stories, experiences, and ideas. These events offer a participatory way to engage the community, turning abstract concepts into tangible experiences while strengthening emotional connections and promoting collective reflection.

Case Study: Banyule City Council

Banyule City Council exemplifies inclusive community engagement, ensuring all voices, especially from underrepresented groups, are heard and valued. By **partnering with First Nations artist Merindah-Gunya**, Banyule created an **inclusive space** for both First Nations people and the wider community to engage with Council projects.

The **artwork was unveiled during 'Reconciliation Week'** at an event attended by over 70 people. To promote the artwork further, Banyule introduced branded merchandise at events, featured it in the newsletter, and launched a Shaping Banyule webpage to highlight Merindah-Gunya's work and its story.

To learn more, read the full case study: <https://www.socialpinpoint.com/case-studies/banyule-city-council-connecting-with-the-community-through-art/>.

Cross-Cultural Communication

When engaging with diverse communities, **understanding cultural nuances is key to building trust and creating connections.** Effective cross-cultural communication requires being mindful of differences in customs, values, and traditions, as they can significantly influence participation. By considering these factors, we create more inclusive, respectful processes that encourage greater community involvement.

Key Considerations to Keep in Mind

- **Gender roles and separation in discussions:** In some cultures, gender roles require separate spaces for men and women. When working with mixed-gender groups, consider who should lead the conversation, as expectations may vary. Male facilitators may not be able to speak to female groups, so mixed-gender facilitation teams may be necessary.
- **Religious considerations:** Religious observances, such as the call to prayer in Islam or the Sabbath in Judaism, can affect participation. Being mindful of religious schedules, offering prayer rooms, or adjusting event times can help promote inclusivity and avoid discomfort during fasting or prayer.
- **Dietary considerations:** Be aware of dietary needs, offering halal options for Muslims, kosher for Jewish communities, and vegetarian or vegan choices for Hindus and Buddhists. Local leaders or cultural representatives can guide you in making appropriate offerings.
- **Social norms and etiquette:** Cultural norms can impact engagement, even when they're not immediately apparent. For example, handshakes may be common in Western cultures but inappropriate in others, such as in Japan or in some Muslim communities, where women may avoid shaking hands with men. Understanding these norms is key to ensuring respect and inclusivity, which fosters trust and encourages meaningful participation.
- **Low-trust communities:** Some communities, such as immigrant and refugee communities, may be wary of interacting with government officials. Partnering with organizations that serve these communities—such as Spanish-speaking churches, community development corporations, ethnic grocery stores, or local community groups—and empowering the leaders of these organizations to collect feedback can often be a more successful way to reach low-trust communities.
- **Communication with Deaf communities:** Consider the needs of Deaf or hard-of-hearing members by providing sign language interpreters, captions, and accessible written materials.

Accommodating cultural differences **requires thoughtful allocation of time, effort, and resources.**

Collaborating with local leaders to identify key cultural needs ensures that efforts align with the community's needs, fostering a respectful, inclusive environment. This investment strengthens connections with underrepresented groups and encourages more meaningful participation.

Cultural Engagement Brainstorm

When planning your next community engagement project, take note of cultural and religious holidays that might affect your schedule. Creating a multifaith calendar can help you stay on track and plan accordingly.

SECTION 5

Measuring Success

This section stresses the importance of setting clear goals, tracking demographics, and refining strategies to ensure your engagement efforts effectively meet community needs.

Focusing on Representation and Inclusivity

Success in equitable engagement means demonstrating equity in outcomes, not just effort.

Identifying the groups most likely to be impacted at the start of a project should guide all decisions and resource allocation. **The goal is to address systemic inequities and prioritize those historically overlooked**—not to simply check a box or stage diversity for appearances.

Collecting self-reported demographic data is important for assessing whether you're reaching your target groups, but it requires careful consideration. Additional personal questions can deter participation, so it's important to focus on one or two key demographic indicators that are essential for measuring success. To reduce barriers, consider collecting this information anonymously or separately from other feedback activities. **Always tell participants why you are collecting demographic data.**

This **process is often iterative**, requiring monitoring and adjustments to achieve fair representation of the groups and demographics impacted by a project. For example, when engaging the public to inform an update of your transit network it will be critical to engage the most transit dependent or mobility-challenged residents to make sure the planned changes close equity gaps. This might mean ensuring adequate representation of certain underserved neighborhoods or zip codes, lower income individuals, or specific age groups. It may be necessary to monitor participation and readjust the outreach strategy a number of times until engagement goals are reached.

Note: Achieving “representation” is rarely straightforward. Always conduct a demographic analysis in collaboration with your community and develop a communications and engagement plan that outlines how you will engage the diverse cross-sections of the population.

Case Study: The NextGen Bus Study, Los Angeles Metro

The NextGen Bus Study, led by LA Metro and Arellano Associates, highlights the power of setting clear engagement goals and metrics. Aimed at reimagining the bus network for LA County's diverse population, the study used multilingual surveys and targeted social media outreach to engage underrepresented communities. These efforts resulted in over 6,900 participants, with demographics closely matching the county's diversity—within one percentage point of ethnic, gender, age, and income distributions. This strong representation helped identify unmet transit needs and align the plan with community priorities, leading to the LA Metro Board's swift approval and paving the way for impactful improvements.

To learn more, read the full case study: <https://metroquest.com/case-studies/la-metro-equitable-public-engagement-success-for-nextgen-bus-study/>.

SECTION 5

Actionable Steps for Advancing Equity

This section outlines strategies for advancing equity in community engagement, emphasizing advocacy, goal-setting, targeting, monitoring, addressing unmet needs, and ensuring accountability.

Building a Foundation for Equitable Practices

To effectively address equity, organizations must first recognize its importance and commit to meaningful action. This requires a proactive approach to advocating for equity at every level of decision-making, from leadership to community engagement. By laying a strong foundation for equitable practices, we can create an environment where diverse perspectives are heard and respected, setting the stage for transformative change.

The following strategies provide a roadmap for advancing equity in community engagement, focusing on the proactive steps needed to build inclusive practices, commit to measurable goals, target the right participants, and address unmet needs effectively.

Advocate for Equity

- **Build agency commitment for equity:** Encourage leaders within the organization to make equity a core priority and budget for it accordingly. Develop clear statements of commitment and action plans that show how equity will be embedded into engagement efforts and decision-making. Advocate for appropriate budget allocations to ensure sufficient resources are dedicated to achieving inclusive community engagement results.
- **Leverage resources:** Take advantage of available tools, resources, and networks to advance equity. Showcase case studies that illustrate the costs of neglecting equity and the benefits of prioritizing it, highlighting how decisions informed by community input can prevent costly errors and lead to better project outcomes.
- **Include engagement requirements in RFPs:** Ensure that Requests for Proposals (RFPs) include clear, goal-based engagement requirements. This can set the expectation that any project involving public input will prioritize inclusive and equitable practices.

Resource Brainstorm

Take a moment to brainstorm: **What resources can support equitable engagement in your community?** For example, in the United States, the **Environmental Justice Working Group**, the **Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Handbook**, and **Justice40** initiatives provide valuable frameworks. In Australia, the **Towards Fairness** report is an essential guide and in New Zealand, the **Government's Language and Culture Policy** promotes the use of both Māori and English in public projects to ensure inclusivity.

Commit to Tangible Goals

- **Define community diversity:** Identify the key dimensions of diversity that are relevant to your community. This could include race, ethnicity, gender, income levels, transportation modes, geographic areas or others. Understanding this diversity will help ensure that engagement efforts are truly representative.
- **Identify critical voices:** Each project or plan will have a unique scope. Research which groups or individuals need to be heard to represent the full spectrum of the community's needs relevant to the process. Examine past engagements and speak to community leaders to understand which voices have been historically underrepresented.
- **Commit to the level of representation needed:** Set clear goals for the level of representation needed for each cohort that will give you confidence in the community's input. Allow flexibility in the project schedule and budget to ensure your team has the time and resources needed for success.

Target and Monitor

- **Design engagement to target each cohort or area:** Use tailored strategies to engage different community cohorts or geographic areas. Incorporate targeted outreach to ensure that underrepresented or overlooked groups are included in the engagement process.
- **Track participation and adjust accordingly:** Keep a close eye on engagement numbers and participation patterns. Once you've completed your gap analysis, if certain groups are underrepresented, adjust your strategies or outreach methods to ensure you reach them. Regular monitoring allows for course corrections to meet participation goals.
- **Keep at it until goals are met:** Stay persistent in your efforts. Traditionally underrepresented groups are often the most difficult to reach audiences so often it takes extra time, effort, and creativity. Continue outreach efforts until the participation goals are achieved.

Address Unmet Needs

- **Identify unmet needs:** Take time to analyze the data from your engagement process. Pay close attention to the input of traditionally underserved or disadvantaged populations. What priorities and needs were identified? Understanding these unmet needs is crucial to addressing them in planning decisions to close equity gaps.
- **Make changes to address these needs:** Act on the insights gained from engagement and make tangible adjustments to your plans or strategies. Ensure that decisions are inclusive of the voices and needs of underserved or underrepresented communities.
- **Monitor to ensure needs are met:** Create a process to monitor the ongoing impact of your efforts to ensure that the needs identified in the engagement process are being met. This involves assessing whether the changes made are closing equity gaps and making a meaningful difference.

Report Back

- **Communicate with decision-makers and the public:** Keep all involved parties informed by regularly reporting back on the progress of the engagement efforts including calling out what equity gaps were identified and how they are being addressed. Transparency with both decision-makers and the public helps build trust and support for future initiatives.
- **Share results with colleagues and partners:** The equity gaps that are identified will often require sustained and collaborative efforts to be resolved. Sharing findings and efforts being made to close the gaps internally with other planning efforts and externally with other agencies and community partners can help foster synergistic efforts and reinforce collaborative relationships.
- **Build on results for future improvements:** Use the insights gained from each engagement process to enhance future efforts. Continuously refine strategies based on feedback and outcomes, ensuring that each community engagement iteration is more effective and inclusive. Keep relevant parties informed about upcoming opportunities and how they can contribute, using a relationship management tool like **Consultation Manager** to streamline communication and ensure they are prepared for the next project.



What's Next?

Social Pinpoint will continue to monitor industry trends, sharing insights through a series of articles, resources, and case studies. We'll dive deeper into survey results, explore key themes, and provide valuable tools to support ongoing engagement efforts.

Follow along at <https://www.socialpinpoint.com/>.

