



3 Building Equity into Your Process

Overview

In this section, we will help you think more deeply about how to ensure your process is one that considers fairness and equitable participation across many groups in your community. Take time as a group to reflect on and discuss stereotypes, personal biases (we all have them), and power dynamics present in the community.

Creating a Working Group

If you haven't already done so through the community mapping activity in *Section 2: Getting Started*, we recommend that you take some time to create a community working group for your civic health efforts. We recommend a group of 5 to 10 people who represent many different political identities, professional backgrounds, ages, races, genders, and abilities.

Identify groups in a community who are often unheard and unseen by others or have not had as much voice or power in public decisions. Include young people, older people, people of color, people across the political spectrum, lower-income people, people with disabilities, and people who may not feel welcome or respected. Make sure your work shows the complexity of people living and working in your community and how they engage (or maybe are missing the opportunity to participate) in civic life.

If you don't know people outside of your social circle and aren't sure how to approach these new folks, don't worry! Here are a list of strategies below you can use to bring in new perspectives to your civic health work:

- ▶ Approach a leader of a community organization in your local community or in the region that you know serves some of the populations you would like to reach out to but don't know yourself. An example would be the local director of an NAACP chapter or YMCA. Ask that leader if they would be willing to sit down for a coffee or video call so that you can share more about civic health and why you are hoping to reach the populations they serve. The leader may be able to make recommendations of people to engage in your process.
- ▶ Host an event aimed at attracting a particular population that you don't have many relationships with—like a welcome evening for New Americans who are living in the area or a cookout at a skate park for youth. You could have a table with information or make an announcement about your civic health work there to inform people about how to be part of your work.

Going Beyond the Usual Suspects—Who's Not Showing Up and Why?

The Community Mapping exercise in *Section 2* helps you consider the different kinds of people present in your community so that you can talk with them about civic health. We suggest that you intentionally listen to groups who traditionally have had less voice in your community. For instance, New Americans, refugees, and immigrants often offer valuable insights into public engagement, yet they may be less likely to attend public meetings traditionally held in municipal buildings and may prefer to meet at a trusted community center. Go to where people gather and keep updating the spaces and places you identify in your Community Tour. All of this will help you to gain a broader understanding of civic health in your community.



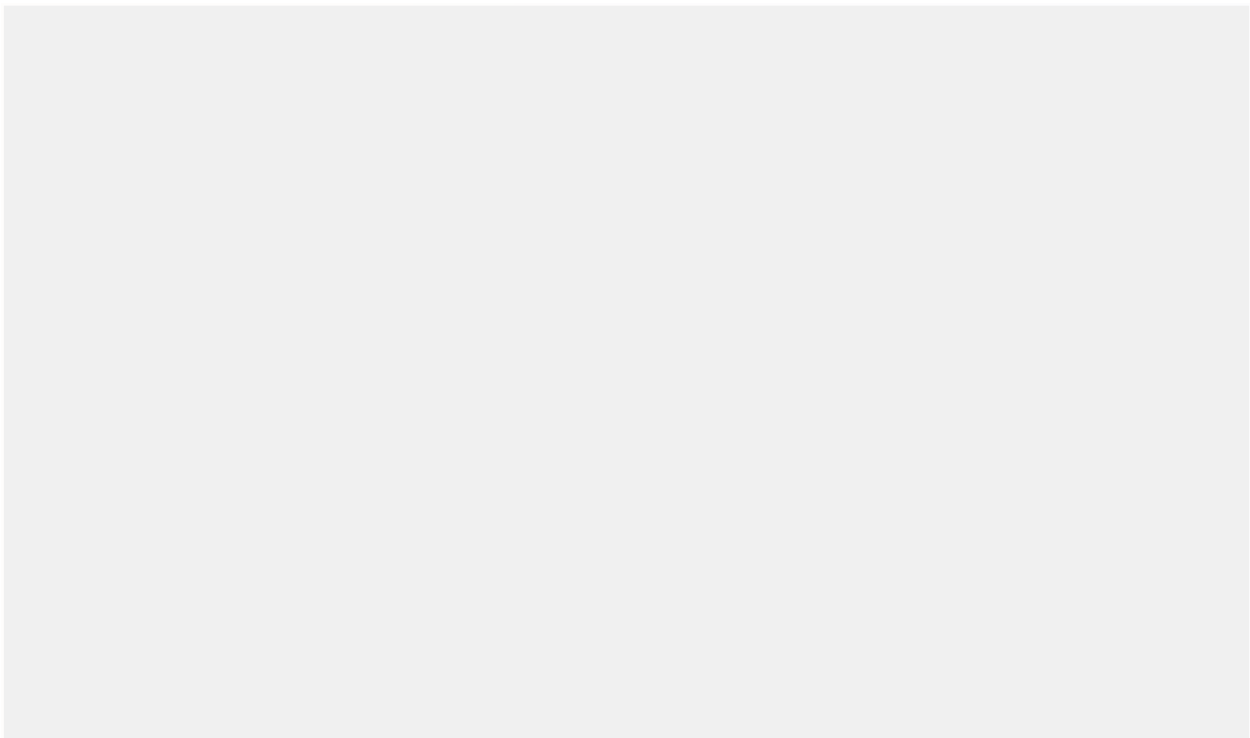
People have a number of reasons why they do not participate in civic and community events. You may hear or think that people do not care, but this is a common misconception. People engage and choose not to engage for a number of reasons. We know that people may not attend public meetings because they work second or third shifts. They may have children or other loved ones who need their care at home. Transportation is often a big reason people cannot access community resources—a well known infrastructure issue that affects overall civic health. People who aren't turning up to engagement opportunities may not trust the process or may find the engagement opportunities offered seem boring and not worth their time. Learning the reasons behind why people do and don't engage in your community is important.

It's also important to recognize that some communities have hurtful histories that impact why people don't want to engage in community life. This can be at all levels of community. For instance:

- ▶ An interpersonal conflict between a school superintendent and a parent may result in a parent feeling unwelcome at school events.
- ▶ In a community where there has historically been a lot of discrimination and hateful acts, like a hate group pamphleting a neighborhood—people of color may not feel comfortable attending community events.

Getting to know your community, including the good, bad, and ugly, is important to moving forward. Communities where one group dominates and others don't have much power can get complicated as there will always be groups that are frustrated with those dynamics. Relationships matter a lot. We find once the relationships are built across differences in the community, difficult conversations and change become easier, and civic health can grow.

Overall, we highly recommend you collect information about civic health at the local level. We also recommend your working group makes a strategy for listening and engaging all different types of people, including folks who have been frustrated with community life or who are not very present in it. Understanding the forces behind their actions will help you as community leaders to address civic health in the future.





DO LESS, DO MORE: STRATEGIES FOR EQUITABLE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Goal: This tool is a way to explore ways to build equity into your civic health work.

Building Equitable Opportunities

Civic health outcomes require attention to fairness for them to be successful. For instance, if there are not equitable opportunities for voting, it affects who votes and who doesn't and can influence elections. Civic health outcomes can also affect inequities. For instance, if you don't trust others in your community, you may be less likely to want to see the same opportunities for everyone.

Building equitable opportunities for engagement in your communities is an ongoing and intentional process. Opportunities need to be designed collaboratively. Your working group needs to include processes for:

- ▶ building trusting relationships
- ▶ sharing power
- ▶ working collaboratively with different community populations
- ▶ reflecting on history and lessons learned

Equitable engagement can feel overwhelming at first. The good news: local leaders willing to work collaboratively can pave the way to systems change. Together they can consider their own leadership practices and habits to take steps forward together.

This “do less, do more list” encourages us all to be more reflective of patterns and practices. It is a list you can use to think through different challenges or dynamics you are seeing in your community, and is a way of reframing your thinking.

More and more, we are seeing people in organizations and communities demand authentic engagement in the decisions that impact their lives. And when it comes to rethinking a decades-old status quo, it's hard to know where to begin. The shifts in the table below can help you model equitable community engagement. These shifts can set the stage for more fair and equitable communities. The suggestions are low-cost, high-impact modifications. They are invitations for replacing “default” modes of engagement with opportunities to be more inclusive and creative. Even if you select just one thing to focus on from the list below, you'll be on your way to developing habits that can foster authentic engagement, collaboration, transparency, and social trust.

Do Less	Do More
“Why don't they ever come to things”	“How can we involve them in developing events?”
Emailing	Face to face conversations
Explaining why	Asking why
Relying on the same folks	Connecting with new and different groups of people
Designing and facilitating all the meetings	Building others' capacity to lead
Making assumptions	Looking for your own potential biases

Hosting events at the offices of government or organizations	Hosting events in the community
Marketing and public relations on behalf of who is leading the engagement (helping the public to “buy in”)	Inviting personal stories and listening to community experiences related to the topic
Looking for a quick fix or clear resolution	Sitting in discomfort and allowing the issue to be complex
Setting the agenda	Finding out what is important to others
Waiting to share something until it is a finished product	Bringing others in to design, refine, and communicate about a work-in-progress
Getting everyone on board	Embracing and exploring disagreement
Having all the answers	Admitting “I don’t know” or “I’m still learning”
Collecting and analyzing survey data behind closed doors	Sharing and making meaning of data with the people surveyed
Feeling stuck and overwhelmed	Confident in small concrete actions

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Taking Action

This section may cause you to do some reflection about the way local systems and policies are structured that discourage or encourage participation from people. You may also identify some personal skills you want to work on.

- ▶ When you think about the way the community has historically structured meetings or events, are there ways you could do it differently to make things more accessible, welcoming, and fair?
- ▶ Have you learned anything about yourself through this section that you want to reflect with a friend or colleague about?
- ▶ Do you want to learn about the experiences of someone else in your community after doing this exercise? How might you approach that person?



Conclusion

We hope this section of the guide has helped you to reflect on how to hear from everyone in your community. Knowledge is power, and understanding your community is key to strengthening civic health. Continual reflection on social equity can help us all create communities where everyone feels welcome, listened to, and valued.