



## Community Engagement for Cooperative Extension: Inform and Consult from the Spectrum of Public Participation

Series Publication 5 of 7

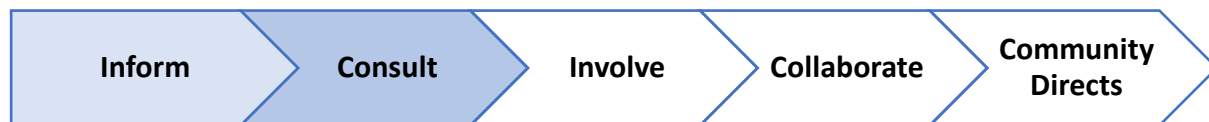
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### Introduction

Community engagement addresses the core concerns of residents and stakeholders by engaging them in a process of initiating, drafting, and implementing community-based programs. Community engagement guides collaboration and communication among organizations, stakeholders, and the public to create sustainable community-driven change.<sup>1</sup>

The International Association for Public Participation has developed a spectrum of public participation with five different levels that indicate the various depths of community engagement.<sup>2</sup> The levels include **Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, and Community Directs** (Figure 1). This publication will review the **Inform** and **Consult** levels of the spectrum.

**Figure 1. The Spectrum of Public Participation – Inform and Consult**

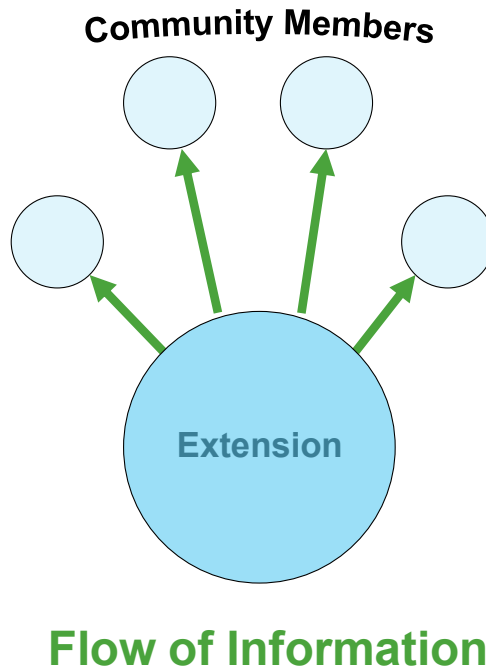


### Inform

The first level of engagement, **Inform**, aims to provide the community with balanced and objective information to assist in understanding the University of Arizona's Cooperative Extension (Extension) and its work. Extension will keep the community **informed** by providing the community with relevant information such as programs and interventions that are taking place in the community that address community problems and concerns.<sup>2</sup>

At this level of the spectrum, information flows in one direction from Extension to the community (Figure 2).<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 2. Flow of Information at the Inform Level of Spectrum of Public Participation**



The goal is to inform as many people as possible about the work Extension is doing in their community. It is important to build community members’ awareness of Extension’s work and its accessibility to the community, especially to those who have not participated in Extension’s programs in the past. As in all of Extension’s work, a community’s language, literacy level, and ability should be taken into consideration in implementing relevant programming. Examples of engagement activities that **Inform** the community are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1. Examples of Community Engagement Activities that Inform the Community**

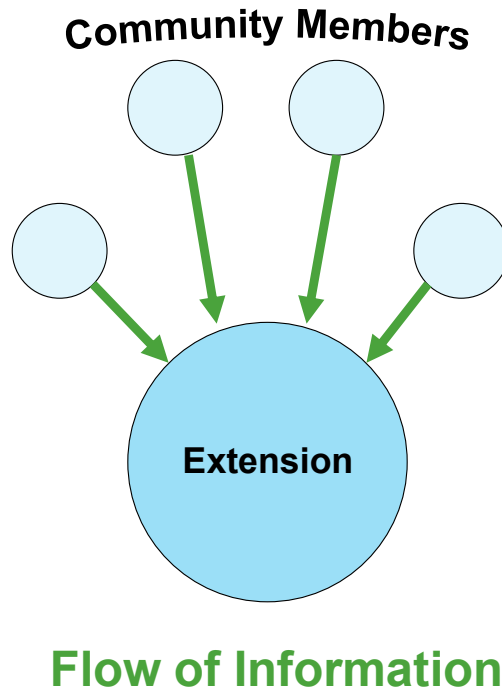
Community Engagement	
<b>Press Release</b>	A short news story sent to targeted members of the media to pique interest. Contains essential information (who, what, when, how, and why) for the journalist to easily publish a story. <sup>3</sup>
<b>Fact Sheet</b>	An at-a-glance document, typically no more than one to two pages in length, to provide an overall description of an organization or a topic. <sup>4</sup>
<b>Social Media Campaign</b>	A coordinated marketing effort to reinforce or assist with an organizational goal using one or more social media platforms. Campaigns differ from routine social media posts because of their increased focus, targeting, and measurability. <sup>5</sup>
<b>Forum</b>	A public meeting or lecture involving audience discussion. <sup>6</sup>
<b>Educational or Informational Event</b>	Any event where an organization can educate the public and/or raise awareness about their organization or a specific topic. Often achieved through tabling, engaging games, or mini-lessons. <sup>7</sup>

## Consult

The second level of engagement, **Consult**, involves Extension obtaining community feedback when analyzing problems, considering alternative solutions, and making decisions.<sup>2</sup>

At this level of the spectrum, information begins to flow from the community to Extension (Figure 3).<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 3. Flow of Information at the Consult Level of Spectrum of Public Participation**



While consulting a wide array of community members is important, an effort should be made to engage community members traditionally excluded from the decision-making processes. Consider the type of engagement that will meet a community's needs and develop strategies to improve representation. Examples of engagement activities that **Consult** with the community are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2. Examples of Community Engagement Activities that Consult with the Community**

<b>Survey</b>	A collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions. <sup>8</sup>
<b>Focus Group</b>	An interview with a small group of people (6-12) on a specific topic. The goal of the group is to collect data/feedback in the social context of the group setting. <sup>9</sup>
<b>Asset Mapping</b>	A strengths-based approach to community development; a process of identifying resources that exist within the community, with the goal of documenting these resources to incorporate them into future community development work. <sup>10</sup>
<b>Community Walkshop</b>	A facilitated, interactive walking tour of a chosen area of the community, with the goal of better understanding a community member’s perspective on its unique assets, challenges, and opportunities. Walkshop feedback can be captured through words, photos, videos, or even drawings. <sup>11</sup>
<b>Audio Reporting</b>	A data collection method that involves developing a prompt that asks participants to provide verbal responses which are recorded. <sup>12</sup>
<b>Dot voting</b>	An established facilitation method that uses dot stickers or marks to vote on various options; can be used to reach a consensus and prioritize options. <sup>13</sup>
<b>Carousels or Graffiti Walls</b>	An engagement activity that uses a series of prompts written on poster paper and placed around a room or other location. Participants circulate around the room, providing written responses to each prompt. Posters can be set up at outdoor events or other locations with foot traffic (e.g., parks, farmers’ markets, etc.) to capture participant feedback as they walk by. <sup>14</sup>

### Strategies for Consulting with Communities Without Using Surveys

When considering efforts to consult with communities, it is important to consider strategies other than surveys. Surveys can be great tools, but without targeted recruitment and outreach, surveys can often have low response rates.<sup>14</sup> They also can be hard for non-native speakers or those with lower literacy levels to complete. Compiling survey results may also require significant data entry and/or analysis efforts that may be beyond the capacity of the Extension staff.<sup>15</sup>


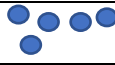


If a program is interested in collecting information in the form of numbers, or quantitative data, consider strategies like dot voting.<sup>12</sup> If a program is interested in collecting information in the form of thoughts and ideas, or qualitative data, focus groups, interviews, comment boxes, carousels or graffiti walls, and audio reporting are useful alternatives to surveys (Table 2). Once quantitative or qualitative information is gathered it can be used to guide Extension programming in the community.

## Highlighting a Community Engagement Method: Dot Voting

Dot voting is a strategy to quickly gather feedback from a large group of people that can be particularly useful for pop-up engagements—a space set up in a well-trafficked community location to gather input from community members on their preferences.<sup>13</sup>

Using large sheets of paper and dot stickers, staff can ask questions that either include multiple options, such as asking about additional resources or services needed by food bank visitors, or use scaled responses, such as asking how often individuals are concerned about running out of food (Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Dot Voting with Multiple Options and Dot Voting with a Scaled Response**

<i>What else would you like to see offered at the food bank?</i>	
Diaper bank	
Clothing bank	
Adult education classes	
Parenting classes	
Exercise groups (e.g., yoga class, walking club)	

### *How often are you concerned about running out of food?*



## Dot Voting Instructions & Variations

- Decide how many votes each person will have and whether they can vote multiple times for the same option.
- Be sure to provide instructions on how many dots a person may place on a given option.
- Allow one dot per option to determine how many people support the option.
- Allow people to place as many dots as they want by any option (everyone should receive an equal number of voting dots to start) to gather data on how strongly people feel about the option and to prioritize options.
- Provide different colored dots to members of the different groups if the program is interested in the responses of different groups of people. For example, give the regular visitors green dots, occasional visitors yellow dots, and new visitors pink dots.

The advantages of this strategy? Dot voting provides quick “at-a-glance” results. Multiple questions can easily be asked on multiple sheets of paper. Dot voting can be done asynchronously, meaning dot voting

can be left up for people to complete when they visit the location, rather than requiring everyone to vote at the same time.

The disadvantages? People may be hesitant to be completely truthful, especially for a sensitive question, if others are watching. People may also be swayed by the other votes that they can see.

### **Highlighting a Community Engagement Method: Audio Reporting**

Audio reporting is a type of data collection that involves developing a prompt that has recorded responses. The materials needed include a recording device, such as a smartphone, tablet, or laptop, and response prompts.<sup>11</sup>

People are given instructions to record themselves, have someone else record and interview them, or utilize a voicemail recording that automates the process. For example, a temporary voicemail box can be set up using an online service such as Google Voice. The phone number can be shared with community members. The voicemail message then allows callers to leave their recorded opinion.<sup>12</sup>

Before starting an audio reporting project, test the prompt with a few people for clarity and the type of responses expected. If audio reporting is done in person, become familiar with the recording feature on the recording device before the first session.<sup>12</sup>

Audio reporting projects are more time-consuming for the community members compared to other strategies like dot voting or short feedback surveys. Reviewing responses may be challenging as it may be difficult to identify themes. Responses may not be able to be anonymous depending on the sensitivity of the topic.<sup>12</sup> While there are some challenges to audio reporting, responses may be recorded privately and there is no handwriting to decipher. Audio reporting also may be a way to consult with members of a community that have a strong tradition of oral history, storytelling, or are intimidated by written forms.<sup>16</sup>

### **Continuation of the Community Engagement Series**

This is the fifth article of a seven part-series on community engagement, a collaboration between the [University of Arizona's School of Nutritional Sciences & Wellness – Cooperative Extension, SNAP-Ed](#) (UA SNAP-Ed) and the [Community Research, Evaluation, and Development \(CRED\) team](#) from the Norton School of Human Ecology. The publications reflect the concepts of seven [interactive, online learning modules about community engagement](#) that were developed by the UA SNAP-Ed and the CRED team. The next publication focuses on understanding the involve level of the Spectrum of Public Participation.

**The full Community Engagement in Cooperative Extension article series includes:**

1. What is Community Engagement?
2. Using Interactive Maps to Understand Communities
3. Who is and is not Participating in Community Engagement?
4. Strategies to Improve Representation
5. Spectrum of Public Participation: Inform and Consult
6. Spectrum of Public Participation: Involve
7. Spectrum of Public Participation: Collaborate and Community Directs

**All articles in the series are available at the following link:**

**[Community Engagement in Cooperative Extension Series](#)**

**Citations**

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## Resources

[An Introduction to Consultation Methods](#)

[CRED Non-Survey Options for Consulting](#)

[Dot Voting: A Simple Decision-Making and Prioritizing Technique in Universal Design](#)

[The Spectrum of Public Participation](#)



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