Community Engagement for Cooperative Extension:
Collaborate and Community Directs from the Spectrum of Public Participation
### Series Publication 7 of 7
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Introduction

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

Figure 1. The Spectrum of Public Participation – Collaborate and Community Directs
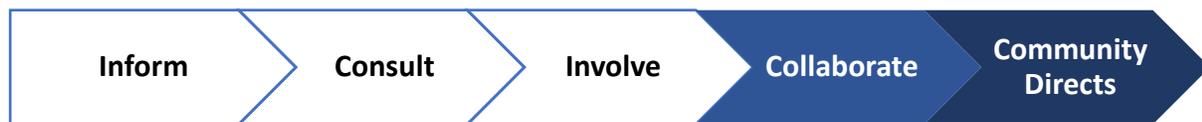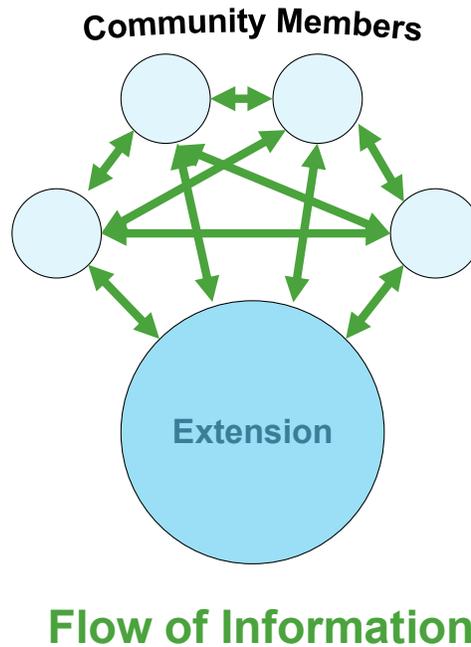

Collaborate

The fourth level of engagement, **Collaborate**, has the goal of partnering with community members in each aspect of the decision-making process. The partnership with the community includes developing and considering alternative solutions and ultimately identifying the community's preferences for a solution or a program. When **collaborating** with the community**,** the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension (Extension) will look to the community for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions. Extension will incorporate the community's advice and recommendations into the decisions or program design to the maximum extent possible.

At this level of engagement, information flows between Extension and community members, as well as between community members (Figure 2).

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

Community Members

Flow of Information

Collaboration should occur at every step of the program cycle. For long-term collaborative engagement, Extension should consider how community members will be compensated for their ongoing participation. Examples of community engagement activities that **Collaborate** with the community are summarized in Table 1.

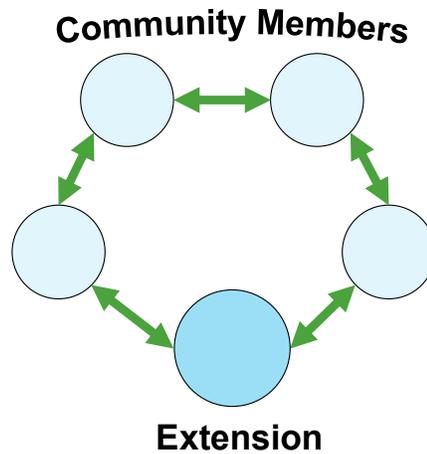**Table 1. Examples of Community Engagement Activities that Collaborate with the Community**

Community Engagement Activities	Description of Community Engagement Activities
Advisory Committee	A collection of individuals who bring unique knowledge and skills which augment the knowledge and skills of the formal leaders to guide the organization more effectively.[2]
Task Force	A temporary group with the purpose of accomplishing a definite objective.[3]
Community Ambassadors	A position responsible for connecting members of the local community with programs offered by a public service office or other community service organization.[4]
Formalized Agreements with Community Coalitions and Organizations	A method of community engagement in which an organization contracts or partners with a community coalition or organization to provide ongoing feedback on a topic area of interest/focus for both agencies. Example: Extension creates a formal agreement with a local coalition to be made aware of current challenges and sentiments from the community.[5]

Community Directs

The fifth level of engagement, **Community Directs**, places final decision-making power within the community. When the **Community Directs**, Extension will implement whatever the community decides.

At this level of engagement, information flows equally between community members and Extension (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Flow of Information at the Community Directs Level of the Spectrum of Public Participation

Community engagement at this level should grow out of the initiatives and efforts of the community. A primary emphasis at this level is on financial decision-making, given it is one of the most significant measures of an organization's priorities and values. Examples of engagement at the Community Directs level are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Examples of Community Engagement Activities that the Community Directs

Community Engagement Activities	Description of Community Engagement Activities
Participatory Budgeting	An engagement tool that asks community members to brainstorm ideas for projects, develop proposals, and then vote on which projects should be funded. To maintain community trust, it is important that funding committed to projects selected stays with those selected projects.[6]
Ballot Initiatives	A means by which citizens may propose, amend, or repeal a state law or constitutional provision through collecting petition signatures from a certain minimum number of registered voters. Ballot initiatives are also referred to as ballot measures, popular initiatives, voter initiatives, citizen initiatives, and propositions.[7]

Participatory budgeting has become a tool of some local governments. The City of Cambridge, Massachusetts has been using participatory budgeting since 2014. The city allocated more than one million dollars to projects in 2019, including funding for water bottle filling stations, extended outdoor Wi-Fi, and pedestrian-controlled crosswalk lights.[8]

Highlighting a Community Engagement Method: Advisory Committees/Task Forces

Advisory committees or task forces can be a useful way to create a structured, longer-term opportunity for community members to provide direction for Extension work.[2] For projects that involve multiple sectors and organizations, advisory committees can be an opportunity to bring representatives from various groups together to collaborate on solutions. To ensure that advisory committees are successful, it is important to establish clearly defined roles and outcomes; this includes an understanding of members' roles in the final decision-making process and a timeframe for their participation.

When creating a new advisory committee, consideration should be given to the size and representation of the group. Ideally, the group will be large enough to represent the diverse perspectives of the community. However, it should not be so large that it becomes unmanageable and limits the participation of individuals. Recruitment should focus on community members most directly impacted by the issues as well as people who are working in sectors that the program will address. Actor mapping, addressed in a previous publication (Article 3: Who is and isn't Participating in Community Engagement), can be a useful exercise for recruitment planning and considering the ideal composition of the advisory committee.

After recruiting a representative group, it is important to reduce attendance barriers to meetings, such as addressing challenges to childcare and transportation. During meetings, group facilitation techniques can encourage authentic participation from the committee members.

Highlighting a Community Engagement Method: Appreciative Inquiry

One facilitation strategy that is effective for groups working to address policy, systems, and environmental changes across multiple sectors is Appreciative Inquiry (AI). AI is a "strengths-based, positive approach to leadership development and organizational change."[9]

AI emphasizes the idea that individuals have unique perspectives on social issues. AI follows a process of asking positive questions, building social connections with group members, and defining the future. Through these activities, the group works towards organizational and social change.[9] For groups and organizations, AI has been used to identify best practices, for strategic planning, and to address more complex multi-organizational social initiatives. AI follows a process called the 5D Cycle which answers the questions below.[9-11]

1. **Define**: What is the purpose of this project?

2. **Discover**: What are the strengths, best practices, and sources of 'life' for this work?

3. **Dream**: What could be new possibilities or an ideal future?

4. **Design**: Based on our strengths and possibilities, what should be the ideal plan moving forward?

5. **Destiny/Delivery**: What will be the process of implementing this plan across the multiple groups and organizations involved?

Using a technique like AI can take considerable planning and learning. Fortunately, given the popularity of AI, there are many existing toolkits and resources available online to get started, including the AI Commons, listed in the "Resources" section of this article.

End of the Community Engagement Series

This is the final 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. To learn more about Extension and foundations of community engagement, as well as about other levels of engagement, please refer to the other publications in this series.

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

1. International Association of Public Participation's (IAP2's) Spectrum of Public Participation. International Association of Public Participation.

http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/imported/IAP2%20Spectrum_vertical.pdf. Published 2007. Accessed June 9, 2021.

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3. "Task Force". https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/task%20force. Accessed July 19, 2021.

4. What is a Community Ambassador? https://www.ziprecruiter.com/Career/Community-Ambassador/What-Is-How-to-Become#:~:text=A%20community%20ambassador%20is%20responsible,organization%20or%20public%20service%20office. Accessed July 19, 2021.

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6. Walcott, E. Engaging the public in local government decisions: Empower. Michigan State University: MSU Extension. https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/engaging_the_public_in_local_government_decisions_empower. Published 2017. Accessed June 9, 2021.

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9. Benedictine University. (2017). *What is appreciative inquiry? A short guide to the appreciative inquiry model & process.* Retrieved from https://cvdl.ben.edu/blog/what-is-appreciative-inquiry/#:~:text=Appreciative%20Inquiry%20(AI)%20is%20a,engaging%20others%20in%20strategic%20innovation.

10. Appreciating People. (n.d.). *Appreciative Inquiry: Starting with the 5D cycle.* Retrieved from https://appreciatingpeople.co.uk/the-5ds/

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Resources

AI Commons

Community Digital Storytelling for Collective Intelligence: Towards a Storytelling Cycle of Trust

Data Walks: An Innovative Way to Share Data with Communities

Digital Stories by Arizona Classroom Teachers

The Community Mapping Toolkit

The Eden Project – Creative Community Engagement Case Studies

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