

6 REASONS WHY PARTICIPATION IS IMPORTANT

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Have you ever seen an advertisement from your local council seeking community feedback on a project and felt like you don't have anything worthwhile to contribute?



You might think that you should just leave it up to the professionals and your elected representatives. Perhaps you are a little skeptical and think that your comments won't be considered anyway since the decision makers are just going to do what they want anyway.

But being involved in community engagement is not a waste of your time and there are many reasons why you should get involved:

1 YOUR OPINION IS IMPORTANT



- Decision makers genuinely want to hear your ideas and feedback.
- Community engagement is a vital part of many projects and the benefits of it are well documented, such as better outcomes for all stakeholders, community ownership and lower project costs.



- Effective community engagement is about recognizing that involving the public in a project is no longer about information dissemination and telling the people what is being done, but is a two-way information sharing tool.
- Regardless of your qualifications, everyone knows what they like and dislike, has an opinion about what needs to be done and where priorities should lay.

2 MORE PERSPECTIVES



- Community engagement is often heavily one-sided, and engagement projects can be inundated with input only from those community members who have a strong opinion (and more often it is a negative opinion about a project).
- Without other perspectives being aired, decision makers might not make the best decision for the community as a whole simply because of a minority of loud voices (squeaky wheel gets the grease).
- If your opinion differs to the more popular opinions, decision makers want to hear from you so they get a balanced understanding of the community's views. Additional perspectives expand options and enhance the value of the ultimate decision.
- The more views gathered in the process of making a decision, the more likely the final product will meet the most needs and address the most concerns possible. If you fear repercussions of going against a vocal group, engagement can often be done anonymously.



3 NEW INFORMATION

- Decision makers recognize that the community that uses the spaces that it is planning for have an intimate and unique relationship with the area that they themselves often do not have.
- Because of this knowledge, community members can provide new information on a project that has yet to be considered.



- Public involvement brings more information to the decision, including scientific or technical knowledge, knowledge about the context where decisions are implemented, history and personalities.
- More information can make the difference between a good and poor decision.



4 COMMUNITY BENEFIT / OWNERSHIP

When the community is involved in a project, they have ownership of it and the decision making process, which is key to a successful project outcome, even if not all individuals necessarily agree with the outcome.



5 IT FEELS GOOD

When a project is finalized and you can see the fruits of your labor, it feels good knowing that you were involved in something that benefits the community.

6 A NUMBERS GAME

For public agencies with political leaders, the total number of people engaged is important. Engaging higher numbers gives the elected representatives confidence in their decision.



HOW DO I GET INVOLVED?

So you want to get involved but you don't know where to start? Most organizations are active on social media & notify their followers when they are seeking comment.



Following key organizations (local government, state agencies, infrastructure providers, etc) on social media is a great place to start. Projects are also usually advertised on organization websites and in the local newspaper.

Online engagement methods are becoming increasingly popular with organizations which recognize the importance of reaching as many residents as possible and you can often sign up to receive notification of when projects 'go live'. The fact that you can participate online at the time and place of your choosing makes it one of the most convenient ways to get involved.



Many organizations undertake annual customer satisfaction surveys and these are a great way to have your say and register your details so that you receive notification of future projects.

Attending public meetings (with no pressure to speak) and talking to your elected representatives or technical officers are also great ways to get an understanding of a project, share your opinion or find out how you can get involved.

