ENGAGING COMMUNITIES IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

A TOOLKIT FOR LOCAL AGENCIES, PLANNERS, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS

EA108
COMMUNITY-BASED PLANNING PRAXIS
PROFESSOR SUSAN PHILLIPS
EDITED & DESIGNED BY CELIA MALONE

Robert Redford
CONSERVANCY
for Southern California Sustainability
PITZER COLLEGE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

01 INTRODUCTION

Community-engaged planning practice is critical in disadvantaged communities (DACs) and environmental justice (EJ) communities that are already impacted by locally unwanted land uses. This is because:

1. Historic inequities and the siting of toxic facilities decrease land values, leading to intergenerational cycles of detrimental project siting.
2. Evaluating individual projects within individual municipalities puts collective and regional impacts on the back burner. A single project generally has a much broader impact than the parcel of land where it is built, joining with other past, present and future projects. So-called "cumulative impact analysis" has been historically weak.
3. Corporate capital and developer influence have shifted the terms of local decision making away from residents, despite vocal opposition to health or environmental detriments that are deemed "significant and unavoidable."
4. Community voice is easily tokenized, ignored, or coopted by the current planning process, resulting in box checking and lack of democratic engagement.

Creating meaningful community-based planning practices in your city or local agency is important! This is because:

1. Community members are intimately tied to neighborhoods and understand the potential impacts of projects better than anyone.
2. Cumulative impacts are not just about numbers; they are about people's health and life in their neighborhoods.
3. Residents have unique insights into project design and sustainable planning for long-term success and quality of life.
4. Protecting the most vulnerable places, people, and creatures ultimately benefits everyone.

Considering community members as experts within planning and development projects re-centers local conceptions of place and the cumulative impacts of projects on land, health, labor, education, social cohesion, and cultural values for the benefit of all.

02 WHY COMMUNITY PLANNING?

Without attention to the experiences of community members, development is an isolated and transactional process that can result in contentious relationships, law suits, and cycles of inequity. These can slow project development, wasting time and money, and creating negative outcomes for communities.

Build Community Networks

Engaging community members in the planning process from a project's inception builds trust and increases understanding of local impacts. Residents deserve to have a say in how their community functions. Their engagement generates new ideas and solutions to problems that developers or planners may be unaware of. Members of the community are often excluded from planning conversations through inaccessible language and a selective understanding of concerns, as well as through limited and ultimately meaningless public comment opportunities. Consider the requirements of CEQA as a baseline that you make sure you exceed. Contact environmental justice or neighborhood groups who are already connected to communities in the area where you are developing a project if you don't have those connections already. Question yourself and be open to new ways of thinking and doing.

Recognize Community Expertise

Developers often work to "virtue signal" residents that the work they are carrying out will better the community, oftentimes bringing in select voices to represent select benefits, while holding the rest of the community at arms-length. Community based planning pushes against the belief that community members can't understand all of the working parts involved in finalizing a development project. Recognizing that community members are experts on their own communities and understand the environmental, cultural, and health based factors and needs is perhaps the most critical step in creating sustainable, equitable planning models for the future.

03 DIFFERENT TYPES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Understanding the difference between traditional planning and community-based planning changes our definitions of expertise and engagement--from deprioritizing community and environmental needs for capital gain and efficiency instead of slowing the process for inclusion and centralizing community voices and needs in the planning process.

Below is a series of infographics you can share with planners, community leaders, and elected officials. Use these principles to decide which practices might be right for your community.

◆ Our updated version of Arnstein's 1969 Ladder Of Citizen Participation ranks community participation and reveals the ways in which communities are excluded and manipulated by planners and city governments. Our updates use relatable language and concepts and move beyond Arnstein's concept of "citizen" to community or resident.

◆ We then cover the differences between Community Based Planning and Technocratic Planning, and explain Participatory planning, which further details how community members can be included in planning.

◆ We end with an explanation of Strategic Single vs Double Loop learning as well as Embedded Planning and Street Level Engagement.

LADDER OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION
updated!
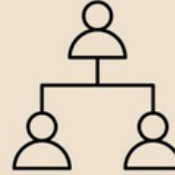### Inspired by Arnstein 1969

Community Control

8 COMMUNITY CONTROL (NAILED IT!)
Residents have power over what happens in their communities. They help negotiate the conditions that may change their neighborhoods. They are at the table early, their voices are respected, and they are part of envisioning and planning their own futures.

7 DELEGATION (GATEKEEPING)
A form of tokenism in which residents are given a limited amount of authority, but the decision-making power still remains in the hands of higher authority. Can work in conjunction with community control or partnership.

6 PARTNERSHIP (FRENEMY)
A form of tokenistic participation in which deals are made with residents who have been given false power on planning committees, board meetings, etc. It's collaborative in name, but kind of sus.

5 PLACATION (LOVE BOMBING)
A form of tokenistic participation where a few citizens are included in the process, but merely to check a box. A common method is to select a few "worthy" residents to serve as token members on advisory boards, to make them feel appreciated but not true participants.

Tokenism

4 CONSULTATION (GHOSTING)
Residents are invited to express opinions with no assurance that their concerns will be taken into account. One example is attitude surveying, which documents resident opinions with no further action.

3 INFORMING (MANSPLAINING)
Informing emphasizes a one-way flow of information from officials to residents, with no channel for negotiation or feedback. Informing comes in the form of pamphlets, posters, and responses to resident inquiries.

2 THERAPY (STONEWALLING)
Experts subject residents to clinical group therapy to "cure" them of their feelings and opinions under the masquerade of involving them in the planning process, restricting access to information or conversation.

Nonparticipation

1 MANIPULATION (GASLIGHTING)
Condescending goals to educate, persuade, and advise residents. Officials advise "uninformed" residents about the benefits of projects and their benefit to community in order to negate community knowledge or critique.

Arnstein, S. R. (July 1969). A Ladder Citizen Participation. Journal of the American Institute of Planners, 35(4), 216-224.
https://www.miguelangelmartinez.net/IMG/pdf/1969_Arnstein_participation_ladder_AJP.pdf

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN
COMMUNITY BASED AND TECHNOCRATIC PLANNING

And why they're important to know!

COMMUNITY BASED PLANNING

Full consideration and inclusion of communities in the planning process. Consider community knowledge to be expert knowledge and integrate into decision making early and often.

VS

Knowledge is in the hands of 'experts' (politicians, consultants, etc.); community voice is an afterthought in the planning process. Focuses on efficiency, pricing, and financial gain.

TECHNOCRATIC PLANNING

INCLUSIVITY
Ensure that all members of a community have the opportunity to be involved in the decision making process (collaborative decision-making)

VS

EXCLUSIVITY
Decisions are made before public input stages/public input is ineffective. Cooption of community voice for project approval but no real or meaningful community engagement. Exclusion is cemented through inaccessible language.

BOTTOM UP APPROACH
Begin project approval with community. Starting with individual micro components and utilizing them to construct a larger system that accounts for smaller pieces.

VS

TOP DOWN APPROACH
Dismissal of community members based on technocratic determinations of 'expertise' and often overrepresentation of developers

CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE
Taking into consideration the cultural values of community members to ensure that the final result reflects something appropriate and respectful to all, including linguistic inclusion

VS

CULTURAL CONTEMPT
Disregard for cultural values, knowledge, and historical connection to land. Privatization of natural resources and displacement of human and ecological communities.

SUSTAINABLE
Ensuring that community needs are met in both the short and the long-term and promoting resilience!

VS

UNEQUITABLE
Divide between deserving and undeserving human communities. Disregard of long-term climate, equity, health, environmental, or other issues.

Grabow, S. & Heskin, A. (1973). Foundations for a Radical Concept of Planning. Journal of the American Institute of Planners, 39(2), 106-114.

PARTICIPATORY PLANNING

THE LADDER OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Sherry Arnstein represented citizen participation as a metaphorical ladder that depict increasing levels of citizen agency, control, and power. Moves from nonparticipation (no power) --> degrees of tokenism (counterfeit power) --> degrees of citizen participation (actual power)

MAKE IT MEANINGFUL

Planners are often not trained to engage with community members, instead relying on a hollowed out and ritualized version of engagement that does not effectively incorporate community input. Be sure community input is more than just checking a box. Ask for help from a nearby environmental justice organization and take the ideas of residents seriously.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IS VITAL FOR 'LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD'

It is necessary for planners to listen to grassroots interests and expand the scope of participation, especially given the increasing layering of complex societal, environmental, and equity problems that accompany project planning.

ACTIONS FOR PLANNERS

1. Invite community groups and grassroots organizations into planning spaces early and often. Meet in their neighborhoods, on their own terms.
2. Use accessible language and offer simultaneous interpretation. Make sure documents are accessible and translated.
3. Formulate project plans with community members, taking into account concerns, experiences, and perspectives. Front-load collaboratively determined mitigation measures.
4. Allow extra time to support community needs and requests during the planning process.
5. Instead of dividing community groups, focus on the deep-rooted and vital connections between them.

ACTIONS FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS

1. Build base. Connect grassroots organizations, religious institutions, and other community-based groups and align values to ensure 'divide-and-conquer' strategies do not occur.
2. Organize. Attend planning meetings with growing networks despite losses to express dedication to fighting for community interests.
3. Be open to hearing the constraints of local agencies, planners, and project developers.
4. Create alliances between education, labor, local business, and environmental groups. Demand transparency.
5. Elect local representatives with shared values.

STRATEGIC PLANNING
Single vs Double Loop Learning

Decision-making in planning must consider both facts and the personal standings of various stakeholders, all of whom carry different values that influence how they interpret facts. Strategic planning helps stakeholders negotiate and agree upon a set of values, and is grounded in the importance of learning from decisions, both in terms of adapting project plans but also reconsidering its a project's fundamental goals, revealing two areas of learning: Single and Double Loop.

SINGLE LOOP LEARNING

First, the planners consider...

The planning methods, or the the techniques used in the planning process.

The consequences, or the environmental, social, and economic impacts of the project.

METHODOLOGY

CONSEQUENCES

Without spending time to question assumptions, project plans and their adaptations stay limited to technical thinking and fail to consider larger objectives and values, and thus are not aligned with the needs of the communities they are built in.

ALTERNATIVES

DETAILS

Finding technical alternatives to address consequencs.

Changing specific aspects of the project, like the site location.

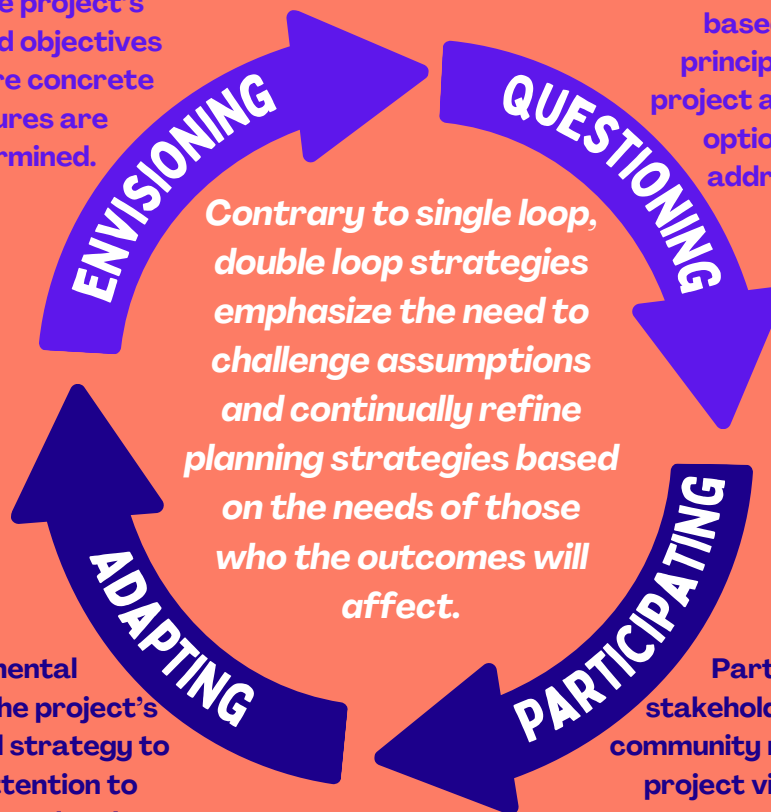### Then, the approach is adapted through...

STRATEGIC PLANNING

DOUBLE LOOP LEARNING

First, planners consider and question...

What the project's visions and objectives are before concrete measures are determined.

What assumptions they have based on what planning principles are suited to the project and what technological options are available to address project needs.

ENVISIONING

QUESTIONING

Contrary to single loop, double loop strategies emphasize the need to challenge assumptions and continually refine planning strategies based on the needs of those who the outcomes will affect.

ADAPTING

PARTICIPATING

Fundamental changes to the project's approach and strategy to increase attention to environmental and community impact and iterate.

Participation with stakeholders, including local community members to establish project vision and distribute ownership over planning objectives, methods, and outcomes among stakeholders.

Then, planners engage in...

Strategic planning is rooted in the ability to view projects from a systems perspective, and advocates for the use of double loop learning to address root causes rather than just symptoms. By continually reassessing and revising foundational visions and objectives, planners create more resilient strategies that ensure environmental and community considerations are integrated into the core of planning decisions. This approach fosters more transparent and inclusive decision-making processes, leading to more effective collaboration and smoother implementation of plans and making them more likely to remain relevant and effective over the long term.

For additional information refer to Gernot Stoeglehner's "Strategicness – the core issue of environmental planning and assessment of the 21st century", pgs. 141-145.

EMBEDDED PLANNING

Inclusivity, collaboration, and equity

"We cannot plan from our desks."

-Jonathan Pacheco Bell

A MAJOR PITFALL OF TRADITIONAL PLANNING IS THE LACK OF "STREET KNOWLEDGE" BECAUSE PLANNING IS DONE BY INDIVIDUALS AND CORPORATIONS WHO HAVE LIMITED KNOWLEDGE OF AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS.

"ORTHODOX PLANNING RELIES ON STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN CONTROLLED SPACES"
THIS BUREAUCRATIC SYSTEM NEGLECTS THE EXPERTISE OF COMMUNITY RESIDENTS ON THE SOCIOCULTURAL ASPECTS OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND CAN LEAD TO A COOPTION OF COMMUNITY VOICE.

EMBEDDED PLANNERS PRIORITIZE STREET-LEVEL ENGAGEMENT BY COLLABORATING WITH RESIDENTS IN PUBLIC SPACES AND GETTING TO KNOW COMMUNITY MEMBERS PERSONALLY.

Jonathan Pacheco Bell's idea of embedded planning has gone viral. He argues that conventional forums for community engagement "attract and prioritize the loudest voices in the room" and those with digital access. Embedded Planning considers the primary work of planners to be on the street-- engaging with community members about community-based ideas. Since Pacheco Bell penned his 2018 op ed on the concept, the idea has begun to shift thinking within planning circles.

https://www.planning.org/planning/2018/oct/viewpoint/

04 RESOURCES FOR LOCAL AGENCIES, PLANNERS, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS

This section covers a list of resources accessible to community members who are looking for ways to get more involved in the planning process and establish avenues of engagement.

◆ Sophie House and Krystle Okafor, "**Under one roof: Building an abolitionist approach to housing justice**" https://nyujlpp.org/quorum/house-okafor-building-abolitionist-approach-housing/

◆ Stephen Grabow, "**Foundations for a Radical Concept of Planning**" *https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Foundations-for-a-Radical-Concept-of-Planning-And-Heskin/4dbcc0b60db79f723e0da9079c4961851016bf78*

◆ Jonathan Pacheco Bell, "**We Cannot Plan From Our Desks**" https://www.planning.org/planning/2018/oct/viewpoint/

◆ Sherry Arnstein, "**A Ladder Citizen Participation**" https://www.miguelangelmartinez.net/IMG/pdf/1969_Arnstein_participation_ladder_AJP.pdf

◆ Lisa Nyamadzawo, "**The Paradox of Participatory Planning in Urban Planning**" https://wp.nyu.edu/wagnerplanner/2020/12/14/the-paradox-of-participatory-planning-in-urban-planning/

◆ Arielle Milkman, "**Why Participatory Planning Fails (and How to Fix It)**" https://nextcity.org/urbanist-news/entry/why-participatory-planning-fails-and-how-to-fix-it

◆ Patrick Sisson, "**Public Meetings are Broken. Here's How to Fix Them**" https://archive.curbed.com/2020/2/12/21132190/neighborhood-development-democracy-city-council-local-meeting

WHY IS PUBLIC COMMENT IMPORTANT?

Public comment is an important way to build community and get a better understanding of what is happening in your home city. While it can be discouraging in some cases, to learn how your city plans and to share your voice is the first step in helping to create a place you're proud to be a part of.

WHAT ARE THE THREE TYPES OF MEETINGS YOU CAN ATTEND?

1 DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY BOARD

Development Advisory Board: (DAB), provides information about the applicable standards and requirements for any construction within the Town. The DAB differs because it is made up of different city staffers from different offices instead of elected officials. Cities are not required to have a DAB so if you can't find information about it, focus your efforts on attending Planning Commission and City Council meetings, or call the city directly and inquire.

2 CITY COUNCIL MEETING

The City Council is essentially the legislative body of city government, it sets the yearly City budget, ordinances and resolutions; tax levies; establishes and maintains sewer and water systems, and organizes broad tax and city service rates.

It is critical to understand that City Council meetings are the last chance for public comment. Your statements will be more impactful the earlier you make comments in the development process.

COMMUNITY-BASED PLANNING TOOLKIT

WHAT ARE THE THREE TYPES OF MEETINGS YOU CAN ATTEND?

3
PLANNING COMMISSION

SO, YOU'VE GOT A PLANNING MEETING IN YOUR CALENDAR... WHAT NOW?

All residents have the right to make public comments on proposed projects or agenda items. There is also the option earlier in the meeting to make general comments to your city's government.

1. Staying informed: Planning commission meetings provide valuable information about proposed land use, zoning changes, and other planning issues in your community. Attending these meetings can help you stay informed about these issues and understand how they may impact your neighborhood or the broader community.

2. Participating in the decision-making process: Planning commission meetings often include opportunities for public comment, giving you a chance to voice your opinion and provide input on planning decisions that may affect you and your community.

3. Holding elected officials accountable: By attending planning commission meetings, you can hold elected officials accountable for their actions and decisions. You can ask questions and seek clarification about their decisions, express your concerns, and share your expectations for how they should represent you and your community.

4. Building relationships with community members: Planning commission meetings provide an opportunity to meet and connect with other community members who are interested in planning issues. By attending these meetings, you can build relationships and work together to advocate for your shared goals and priorities.

Before you arrive: Sift through the meeting's agenda and identify what agenda item your interests pertain to. Agenda's are typically released 2-3 days before the meeting, so if you don't see it posted make sure to check back later. Consider the following questions:

◆ Who is your city planner? Who is on the council?
◆ When are planning commissions meetings?
◆ What issues are on their agenda??

Refer to this toolkit to find out who is on each commission, when they meet, and what items are on their upcoming agenda:
https://www.causeusa.org/publiccommenttoolkit

When you arrive: Enter the meeting room and locate the city clerk who will hand you a comment card. Fill the card out with your personal information and note which agenda item you are speaking about. You must submit your comment card before the meeting begins to be counted for public comment.

WHAT ARE TWO DIFFERENT TYPES OF PUBLIC COMMENT?

1 GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

Earlier in the meeting, anyone from the public may share whatever they would like with the council. You are allotted two uninterrupted minutes to directly address council members. Be sure to share your name.

2 POLICY SPECIFIC COMMENT

Prepare a statement of public comment before arrival; this can pertain to anything from your personal experience with the agenda item, any legal or environmental commentary you may have, to general opposition or support. Make sure to share your name, where you come from, and where you stand on the issue.

★ **Typically you will be allotted two timed minutes, council members ARE NOT allowed to interrupt you or stop your time early!**

COMMUNITY-BASED PLANNING TOOLKIT

05 CITATIONS

◆ House, S., & Okafor, K. (n.d.). Under one roof: Building an abolitionist approach to housing justice. N.Y.U. Journal of Legislation & Public Policy. **https://nyujlpp.org/quorum/house-okafor-building-abolitionist-approach-housing/**

◆ Grabow, S. & Heskin, A. (1973). Foundations for a Radical Concept of Planning. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, *39*(2), 106–114.

◆ Bell, J. P. (October 2018). We Cannot Plan From Our Desks. Planning.**https://www.planning.org/planning/2018/oct/viewpoint/**

◆ Arnstein, S. R. (July 1969). A Ladder Citizen Participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, *35*(4), 216–224.**https://www.miguelangelmartinez.net/IMG/pdf/1969_Arnstein_participation_ladder_AJP.pdf**

◆ Nyamadzawo, L. (December 20, 2020). The Paradox of Participatory Planning in Urban Planning. The Wagner Planner.**https://wp.nyu.edu/wagnerplanner/2020/12/14/the-paradox-of-participatory-planning-in-urban-planning/**

◆ Milkman, A. (April 28, 2021). Why Participatory Planning Fails (and How to Fix It). *Next City.* **https://nextcity.org/urbanist-news/entry/why-participatory-planning-fails-and-how-to-fix-it**

◆ Sisson, P. (February 12, 2020). Public Meetings are Broken. Here's How to Fix Them. **https://archive.curbed.com/2020/2/12/21132190/neighborhood-development-democracy-city-council-local-meeting**