

Authentic Engagement

Is More Than Outreach

2021 APA-PA Annual Conference

Speaker Introductions



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Today's Session Structure

Part 1: What Is Authentic Engagement

- Important Terms and Concepts
- The State of the Union in Engagement
- A Better Approach Is Needed
- Everyday Tips

Part 2: Learning Scenarios

- Group Home
- New Road
- Additional Discussion and Thoughts

Learning Objectives

- ❖ Learn about the six principles to achieving lasting and authentic engagement
- ❖ Understand the difference between 'hearing and listening'
- ❖ Become familiar with the benchmarks that signal when community engagement must be elevated in order to build consensus and support
- ❖ Participate in a series of learning scenarios to become more aware, comfortable and adept at engaging with a diversity of constituents

Key Focus

Why, How, What, Who and Desired Outcomes

What Is Authentic Engagement

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Glossary of Important Terms

- ❖ **Public Participation** - the process by which an organization consults with interested or affected individuals, organizations, and government entities before making a decision; public participation is intended to occur as a two-way communication between parties
- ❖ **Engagement** - the act of engaging or the state of being engaged; involvement; a hostile encounter; a battle
- ❖ **Community** - ??????
- ❖ **Inequity** - is defined as lack of justice or fairness

Community engagement is not a one-size-fits-all proposition; every situation should have a different, customized approach that is scaled to the specifics of the situation/circumstance.

As practitioners, we rely too heavily on formal meetings and one-sided stakeholder discussions.

The failure of a planning process is where a portion of the public does not take ownership in the proposed ideas or solutions because they're disenfranchised or believe that the proposals are inequitable and that the benefits don't outweigh the costs or other potential implications.

Additionally, the world has changed and the need for real, sincere and meaningful engagement is even more essential.

Today, the heart of authentic public engagement is the need to identify differences and to resolve, bridge or mitigate inequities.

Through effective, meaningful and authentic engagement – you're able to find common ground and build consensus towards equitable, long-term solutions.

Community engagement is not a sprint; it's a journey.
Think and plan for the long haul.

When Authentic Engagement Is Needed

❖ Why Did This Happen?!

❖ How Did This Happen?!

Why Authentic Engagement Is Needed

“I don’t agree that the **jobs** and **spin-off economic development** created by the Amazon Fulfillment Center is what our community needs! What about the **24-hour long traffic congestion**, the **impaired air quality from diesel emissions**, add the **noise from the idling trucks** and loading dock activity! No tax base gains can offset the destruction of our quality of life!”

Churchill Creek Conditional Use Public Hearing

Why Authentic Engagement Is Needed

“The basketball court just **brings those bad kids from outside** of the City! **They’re the ones** that start the fights, sell the drugs and **discourage the residents** from using the park.”

versus later in the evening’s discussion

“But the court **is near and dear to the kids** in the neighborhood! Its what the Fifth Ward is known for **it’s the heart of our neighborhood.**”

Greensburg Spring Avenue Park Public Meeting

Why Authentic Engagement Is Needed

“Why put the multi-family zoning district in a small area along Carlisle Pike? No one, even those with limited means, want to live along that highway! There are no sidewalks, no nearby parks – and the never-ending truck traffic is horrible!”

Silver Spring Township Zoning Public Meeting

Why Authentic Engagement Is Needed

“It’s going to cost too much to level the grade of the pathway. Look at all the extra earthwork that is needed and how much more trail will be paved. Most people can walk up the hill. And no one in a wheelchair can play baseball anyhow – so they won’t need to use that path!”

East Buffalo Park Committee Discussion

The State of the Union in Engagement

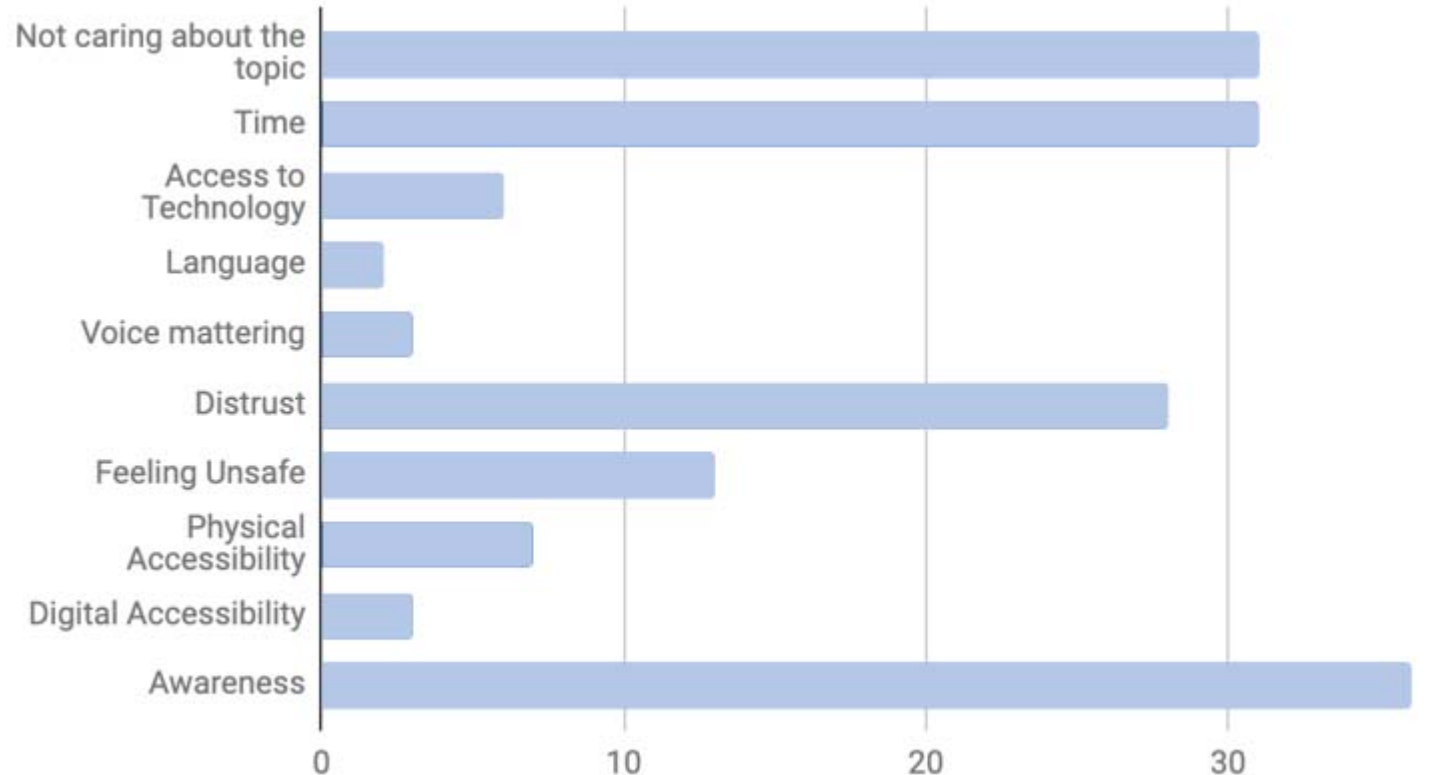
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5 Historic Forms of Engagement



Why People Don't Get Involved

1. Awareness
2. Time
3. Not caring
4. Distrust
5. Feeling unsafe



Barriers to Effective and Meaningful Engagement

Barriers Experienced by the Community

- ❖ Accessibility (physical, cognitive, cultural and technological)
- ❖ Inclusivity
- ❖ Safety

Barriers Experienced by Practitioners

- ❖ Resources
- ❖ Equity

A Better Approach Is Needed!

Authentic Engagement

- ❖ **Authentic Engagement** - is a community engagement process where the public is viewed as an extension of the technical planning effort and takes part of collaborative problem solving.

Authentic engagement creates and maintains a constituency that is educated, aware, motivated, engaged, and fulfilled.

Core Objectives of Authentic Engagement

The problem is
clearly defined.

Public
engagement is
thoughtfully
planned.

All voices are
encouraged and
included.

Public
contribution and
civil participation
are fostered.

The process is
trustworthy and
transparent.

Philosophical Foundations of Authentic Engagement

- ❖ **Relationships** - engagements that were deeper and more human were more effective. Whether it's with our loved ones, or with people we don't know at all, connectedness is key in feeling heard, building trust, reconciliation and empathy

When thinking about relationship building and engagement - it is more than just building relationships between public bodies and the community that they serve. It is also about facilitating relationships between the community. **NIMBYism and BANANA's are still real things** that practitioners are often confronted with, especially with **projects and solutions that bring the unknown into a community**

Philosophical Foundations of Authentic Engagement

- ❖ **Transparency** - ensuring that details of the actual engagement discussions/activities including what was heard, how the input is going to be factored in and the decisions made are publicly documented and shared. This is a very important part of authentic engagement

Other important transparency considerations focus on the actual engagement process details such as **how the decision-makers and practitioners overcame the “real world” barriers** to get broad and diverse input from the community

Philosophical Foundations of Authentic Engagement

- ❖ **Dialogue - foster conversations and discussions;** establish calm and pointed dialogue when there is discord or differences in opinion; get people to express their driving motivations and describe the facts/realities that substantiate their concerns

Recognize that **there's a difference between HEARING and LISTENING**

6 Principles of Authentic Engagement

1 Inclusive

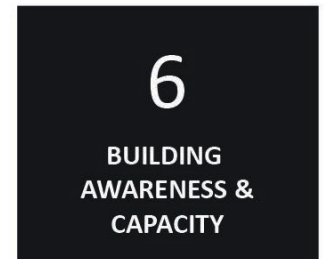
2 Shared and Supportive

3 Accountable and Committed

4 Meaningful and Responsive

5 Continuously Adapting and Improving

6 Building Awareness and Capacity



Principle #1

- ❖ **Inclusion** - proactively reach out and connect to persons who may be affected by an issue or solution in a transparent and equitable manner; go to them and meet on their terms

Make their involvement as convenient to them as possible/practical

Principle #2

- ❖ **Shared and Supportive** - involve the pertinent breadth of stakeholders in the decision-making process where their input can inform and shape the final solutions

Principle #3

- ❖ **Accountable and Committed** - set clear objectives and expectations for community engagement and how the community's concerns and thoughts will be used as part of the decision-making process. Actively listen to the community and record; don't be afraid to ask someone to clarify or expand a thought/comment in an effort to get a better understanding.

DO NOT COUNTER a thought or comment in the initial conversation.
Countering transforms the conversation into a debate!

Principle #4

- ❖ **Meaningful and Responsive** - ensure that the community has reasonable amount of time to react or comment on a situation.

Provide timely follow-up, feedback or response that is fact-based and politically neutral.

ALWAYS FOLLOW-UP!!!

Principle #5

- ❖ **Continuously Adapting and Improving** - continually evaluate and measure the depth/success of the conversations and the input being received. If the conversations appear to be purely agenda-driven or one-sided, readjust your approaches to obtain more voices.

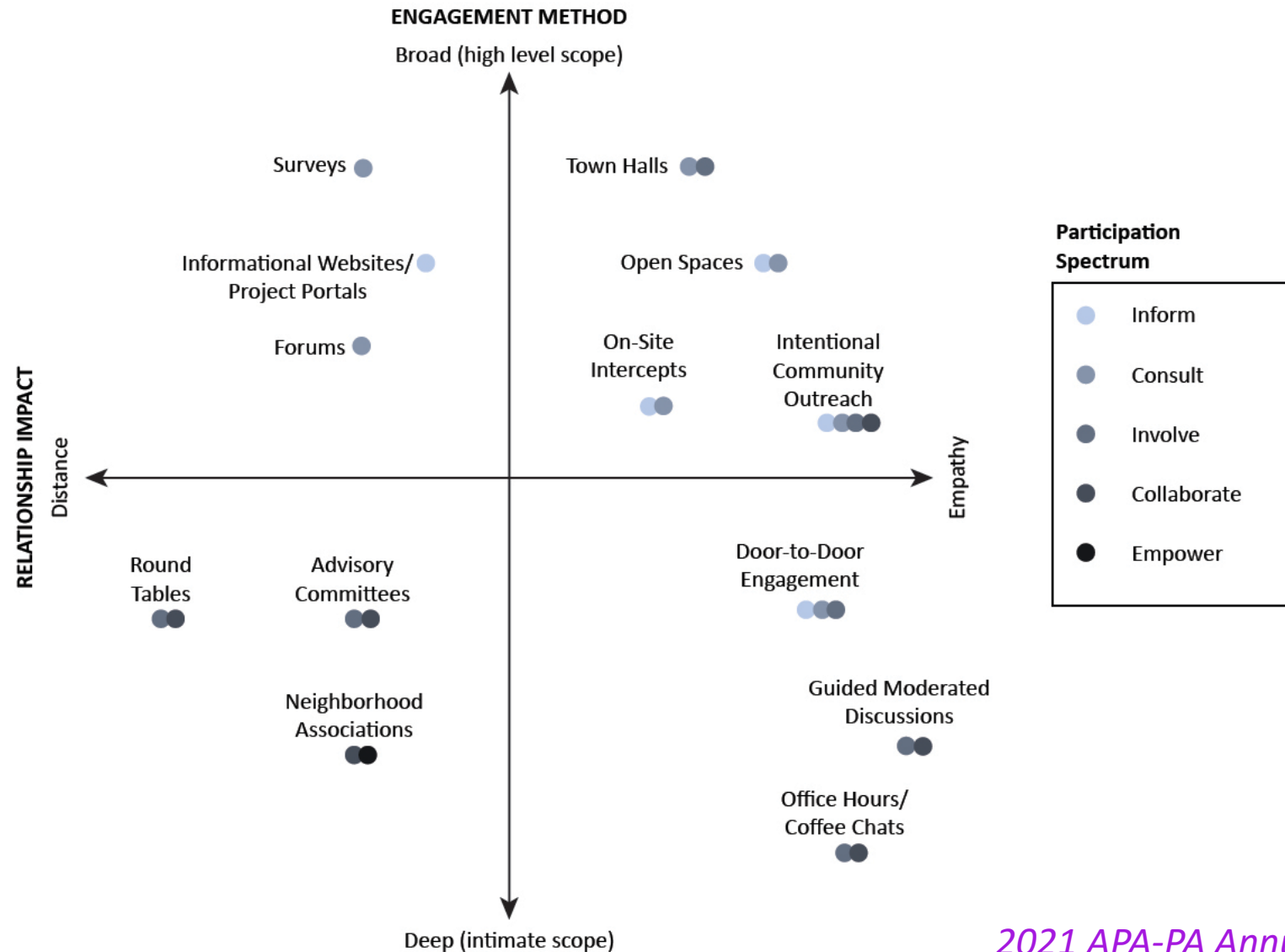
REMEMBER you're trying to find common ground and build consensus to an acceptable solution! The 'squeaky wheel' is usually not the end-all-be-all. Rather, the answer lies somewhere in between.

Principle #6

- ❖ **Building Awareness and Capacity** - use the engagement opportunity to educate the community, to point out the trade-offs and the challenges of striking a balance; show the community how they can 'work through' their own problems.

9 out 10 times – the real value to community engagement is not about a real-time, specific solution; its about the process. The return on investment in community engagement is down the road - its about getting everyone to talking through how they can keep their place great and how they as individuals can flourish in that place.

Scales Influencing Authenticity



Everyday Tips

What Do Practitioners Need to be Mindful of

- ❖ Defining what is meant by “community”
- ❖ Making the community aware of opportunities to participate and get involved
- ❖ Defining clear objectives to the engagement process as well as the means of measuring its ultimate success
- ❖ Innovating to accommodate and overcome time and convenience challenges
- ❖ Doubling up on existing community events
- ❖ Educating the community on the importance of the topic/issue

What Do Practitioners Need to be Mindful of

- ❖ Showing that we are listening and value someone's input, even if we are unable to take action upon something
- ❖ Establishing and cultivating relationships and trust
- ❖ Providing safe spaces or means for people to be able to express their needs

The most important thing to keep in mind is that in the landscape of inclusive engagement, **it's a journey and not a sprint**. Within the circumstances that you may be working within, true inclusivity may be a long way off. **Humility is a key aspect of authentic engagement** as mistakes will be made and in doing so, **lessons will be learned**.

Learning Scenarios

How This Is Going To Work

1. Review a situational abstract and gaining a general understanding of a civic debate or planning situation that has arisen.
2. Each discussion group will formulate a single course of action for authentic engagement as related to fostering meaningful dialogue between the various constituents involved in the situation.
3. Provide your group's input/thoughts via the Survey Monkey links.
4. Review (on screen) all of the group responses as a whole and have open discussion.

How This Is Going To Work

There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers – this is intended to be a mini-laboratory where we as practitioners can listen, share, think, test, fail, regroup, test and succeed – or something like that....

Scenario #1

Acme Health Services is proposing to develop and operate a group home for mentally and physically disadvantaged adults at the end of a cul-de-sac in a single-family zoning district in a suburban Easton community. The proposed use is a permitted conditional use in the zoning district and will occupy an existing residence that has been vacant for more than 3 years.

A resident opposition group has formed and voiced their concerns over the higher density of persons to be placed in the single-family neighborhood. One Supervisor from the community (representing the voting ward where the group home is proposed) has expressed opposition to the development in the local newspaper despite the staff and the Township's appointed experts' review of ordinance consistency and compliancy.

Scenario #1 Survey Monkey Link

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Z3F2LRL>



Scenario #1

1. What are the apparent interest groups/agendas?
2. How would you engage with the local resident opposition group?
3. How would you go about getting a full understanding of the perceived versus real issues and motivations as well as the possible places of common ground?

Scenario #2

Dynasty Real Estate Development is proposing to develop a mixed-use neighborhood in an inner-ring suburban Pittsburgh community. The proposed neighborhood would be built in a former brownfield that has been remediated but has limited existing infrastructure and no existing road access.

A large group of community residents has formed in opposition to the proposed road because of concerns over traffic congestion, the perception that a short-cut would be created and the potential of bringing “those people” into the existing neighborhoods. The opposition group is also against the overall proposed development because they feel it will overburden the school district with children and that it is financially constrained now. In contrast, numerous supporters of the proposal have opted to avoid meetings for fear of public rebuke. They have instead waged an email campaign.

Scenario #2



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Scenario #2 Survey Monkey Link

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/VYGYCYP>



Scenario #2

Questions

1. What are the apparent interest groups/agendas?
2. What are your objectives for the community engagement process?
3. How would you go about getting a full understanding of the perceived or real issues and motivations as well as the possible places of common ground?

Additional Discussion and Thoughts

