



MICHIGAN ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

# ENGAGE YOUR COMMUNITY!

REDEVELOPMENT READY COMMUNITIES  
ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT



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MICHIGAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

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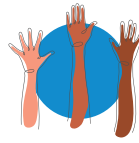




Photos Courtesy of SmithGroup



# 1. WELCOME



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MATTERS

Strong places are built through meaningful engagement that ensures all members of the community are represented. Engagement can inform how projects contribute to the character, usability, long-term use, and experience of places. By actively involving residents, stakeholders, and business owners, communities can represent diverse voices and carry those perspectives into the policies and decisions that shape the future of their communities.

This toolkit can help you identify the steps needed to have meaningful outreach in your community in alignment with Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) best practices. Our tools are made so you can take them and run with them, or tailor them to your community if needed. They can be customized for anything from a comprehensive plan to a zoning ordinance update to streetscape designs and more.



## HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

Use this toolkit to plan for, execute, and report out engagement in your community. These guides will help you...

1. Define Your Engagement Goals
2. Identify Key Participants
3. Set a Project Budget and Schedule
4. Pick the Right Engagement Tools
5. Assess Your Success
6. Report Out



## THE CHALLENGES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT (AND HOW TO SOLVE THEM)

While public participation can be a powerful tool to empower the community and create shared authorship, it is often complex and challenging to pursue. Experiencing a challenge? Consider some of these solutions!



### LIMITED BUDGET

Sometimes there is barely enough money to do the project, let alone tons of engagement on top of the work.

- Prioritize low-cost, high-return strategies (surveys, digital campaigns, events free community spaces)
- Keep questions limited, directly related to the project, and easily quantifiable (see *Tool C - Surveys* for tips!)
- Seek grants (local, state, federal) and in-kind partnerships with local organizations



### LIMITED TIME

Rushed timelines can make it hard to absorb complex information and genuinely incorporate feedback.

- If the deadline can't move, identify one key engagement tool with targeted, simple questions
- If the deadline can move, move it!
- Generally try and have at least 2 weeks for surveys (*80% of responses typically come within 7 days of email invitation and you'll want one week to incorporate feedback*) and 5 weeks for public meetings (*1 week for initial prep/planning, 3 weeks for promotion, 1 week to review and incorporate findings*)



### NO TRUST

Community members can assume their input won't matter based on past experiences.

- Define which project elements are fixed vs. flexible
- Report out what you heard and how feedback was used
- Most important: Follow through on commitments—this rebuilds and sustains trust



### LEADING THE WITNESS

Biased questions direct participants toward predetermined answers, undermining authenticity.

- Revisit original engagement goals early and often
- Pilot questions to distinguish between targeted questions (that gather needed feedback) and leading questions (that push toward preferred outcomes)
- Use scales with an equal number of positive and negative options (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)



### INTERPRETING FINDINGS

Distilling feedback is labor-intensive and participants may doubt findings if the interpretation process isn't clear.

- Develop clear methods to analyze feedback
- Create initial summary and review internally for accuracy
- Present findings to public with direct quotes and context
- Allow community to confirm the summary reflects their input (i.e. "Did we hear you right" stations at events)
- Explain how responses will influence decision-making

# 2. GET YOURSELF STARTED

Are you starting an engagement process? Follow these steps to help keep on track.

## 1. Define Your Project Goals for Engagement

Each project will have a unique set of goals and expectations for how engagement will influence the final design or plan. Write out those goals and understand how they influence the type of tools you will need to have a successful process.

*Are you just seeking to inform the community about what you are doing, or invite them into a collaborative, co-authorship process? Write down a few sentences that describe what you hope to achieve through engagement. See the decision-making tree on the follow pages for inspiration.*

**We are informing them about...**

**We are listening about...**

**We are involving them in...**

**We are collaborating on...**

## 2. Identify Key Participants

Create a list of all of the groups of residents, target demographics, local organizations, and leaders the project will need to engage with.

*Be specific! For example, include names of service groups or civic organizations like Rotary and Lions Club. Even if you do not know who the point of contact will be at each group, listening them will help you remember to reach out.*

*Same for the target demographics - knowing seniors, young families, and renters are important stakeholders will help keep track of who you have and haven't reached throughout the process.*

### 3. Set a Project Budget and Schedule

Outline what your engagement budget and how frequently you plan to engage community members so you can get an idea of how far the budget must go to achieve your project goals.

*Include any key municipality deadlines or legal requirements, like public review periods and council approvals, in the schedule so you understand the potential limitations or conflicts this creates. It is imperative that you understand key project milestones and how engagement will influence the timing and budget of achieving those milestones.*

### 4. Pick Your Engagement Tools

Using the responses from above, you can now determine the tools that best fits your project needs. See the Tools and Strategies Guide on the following pages.

<b>GOAL</b> <i>List what you hope to accomplish</i>	<b>WHO</b> <i>Who are you trying to reach?</i>	<b>TOOL</b> <i>What will you ask them and how?</i>	<b>PROMOTION</b> <i>How will you let them know this is happening?</i>	<b>LOGISTICS</b> <i>What is the date, time, and meeting space of the event (if applicable)?</i>	<b>MATERIALS</b> <i>What will you need to do this activity?</i>
<b>COLLAB: SHARED VISION</b>	<b>RESIDENTS &amp; YOUTH</b>	<b>SURVEY</b>	<b>SOCIAL MEDIA BLAST, 20 POSTERS FOR SCHOOLS + REC CENTERS</b>	<b>RELEASE MAY 1 CLOSE/ REVIEW RESULTS MAY 28 POST RESULTS APRIL 15</b>	<b>DIGITAL SURVEY - MICROSOFT FORMS  PAPER FLYERS</b>

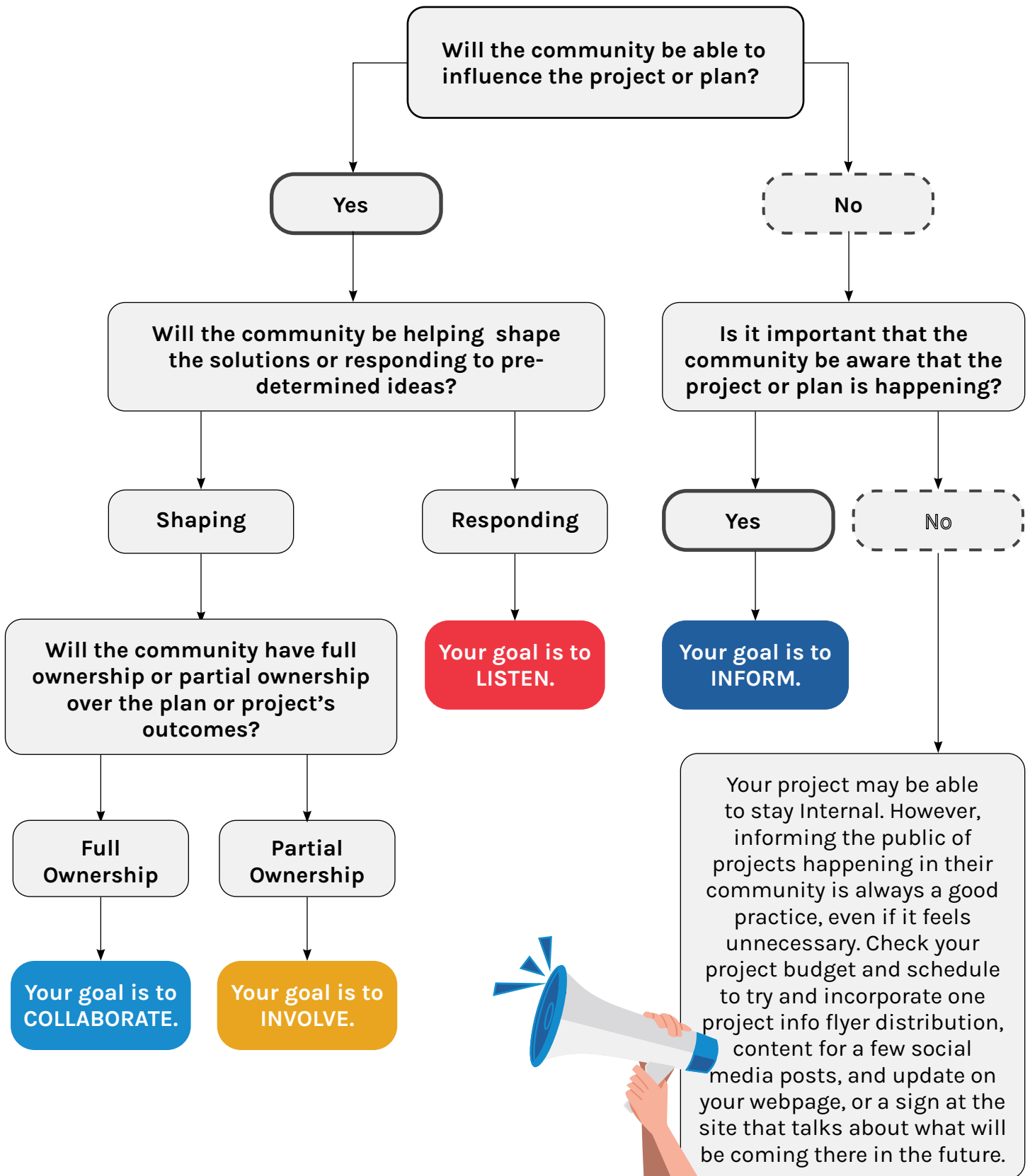
## PICK YOUR ENGAGEMENT GOALS

Consider these four common engagement goals: **to inform, listen, involve, and collaborate**. Depending on your project team's intended outcomes, you might discover that your engagement goals fit within multiple categories. That is ok and more common than you may think! Many times, you will move along the spectrum of engagement goals from hands on collaboration with the community early on to informing them as you move into adoption, implementation, or construction.

You can **collaborate** with the community on early decisions, and then refine those decisions through a process of **listening**. Or you can administer an entire public participation process through **involvement** methods. Filling out this decision-making tree will simply help narrow your focus and give you a baseline of tools and strategies that will help you achieve your goals.



## Use This Decision-Making Tree To Help Establish Your Goals for Engagement



## TOOLS FOR YOUR BUDGET AND SCHEDULE

Now that you have a sense of your project goals, it is time to understand what tools will best achieve those ambitions while also sticking to your project schedule and budget. Use the chart below to see just a few examples of the types of engagement activities you can do within each category. Remember - this is just a start! Be creative, design your own ideas, look at other successful projects and make those ideas your own. This chart is not meant to limit you! It is just to help you get started.



### INFORM

### LISTEN

#### SMALL BUDGET AND QUICK SCHEDULE

- Digital Education Campaign on Social Media
- Press Release
- Email Blast
- Column in the Neighborhood Newsletter
- Website Post
- Announcement in the Local Newspaper

- One Page Survey (Can be Black and White to Reduce Printing Cost)
- Online Survey

#### MEDIUM BUDGET AND MODERATE SCHEDULE

- Flyer or Printed Informational Material
- Informational Signage at and Around the Project Site
- One or Two Informational Meetings
- Pop-Up Table at Existing Community Events
- Public Broadcasting on the News or Local Radio

- Online Survey with a Pre-Recorded Presentation
- **Multi-Page Survey (Digital or Print) - See Tool C**
- Living Wall (Virtual)

#### LARGE BUDGET AND LONG SCHEDULE

- Project Mailer
- Door Hangers
- Celebration Ceremony at Project Completion
- Regular Project Update Meetings
- Information Sessions or Expert Panels
- Resource Fairs

- Statistically Significant Survey
- Living Wall (In-Person)



## INVOLVE

- Pop-Up Table at Existing Community Events
- Virtual Engagement Meeting

- Focus Groups
- Meetings on the Go (also called a Meetings in a Box or a DIY Kit)

- **One Day Community Workshop - See Tool B**



## COLLABORATE

-

- Topic Based Work Group (also called a Coalition)
- **Steering Committee - See Tool A**

- Multi-Day Design Charrette

# 3. UNDERSTAND YOUR TOOLS

To help you get started with a few of these engagement strategies, we have provided templates for Steering Committees, Community Workshops, and Surveys.

These are simply a resource for you to use and a guide for getting started! Make them your own, adapt them to your project needs, and transform them to meet your community where they are.



Click the tool you want to skip ahead to that section!

## BUDGET

## STAFF CAPACITY

### TOOL A STEERING COMMITTEE



Cost could increase if you plan to compensate your steering committee members, provide food or refreshments during meetings, and/or provide childcare.

#### 1 STAFF MEMBER

to facilitate for 4 hours per meeting (2 hours to meet and 2 hours to summarize meeting takeaways), multiply by the number of meetings you would like to host. Helpful to have one additional notetaker.

### TOOL B COMMUNITY WORKSHOP



Cost could increase if you need to pay for facilities rental, have significant printing costs for engagement materials, or will be providing food and/or childcare.

#### Prep: 3 staff

~1 week each

#### Workshop: 4+ staff

~5 hours for a 2-hour session (setup, meeting, tear-down)

#### Summary: 2 staff

~3 days each for feedback and analysis

### TOOL C MULTI-PAGE SURVEY



Cost could decrease if you limit the number of questions, limit the number of pages needed for printing, and keep questions mostly quantitative. Cost could increase if you decide to do a statistically significant survey.

#### Prep: 1-2 staff

1 week to draft and format

#### Survey Period: 1 staff

to monitor and send reminders; Open for 1+ week

#### Summary: 2 staff

3 days each to analyze and document feedback

## WHEN TO USE

- Initial Data Gathering
- Vision and Goal Setting
- Analysis and Concept Development
- Selecting Preferred Ideas
- Refining Ideas
- Implementation

- Vision and Goal Setting
- Analysis and Concept Development
- Selecting Preferred Ideas
- Refining Ideas

- Initial Data Gathering
- Selecting Preferred Ideas

## ENGAGEMENT GOAL



## SCALE OF AUDIENCE

**5 - 20**  
PEOPLE

**30 - 150**  
PEOPLE

**30+**  
PEOPLE

(can be in the hundreds depending on the scale of the project and the geographic area targeted for participation)

# 4. STEERING COMMITTEE

## GOAL

Steering Committees create a unique opportunity for a small group of stakeholders to gather together and provide vision into the decision-making process. They are a representative body for their community and offer a window into the needs and aspirations of their fellow neighbors. As a group, the Steering Committee assists the project team in developing relatable and relevant ways to exercise engagement, involve the broader community into the process, and champion a project's implementation.

## OPPORTUNITIES

When a project team utilizes a Steering Committee that has broader and diverse representation, it can create a bridge for building trust with the community. As the Steering Committee gains trust through their collaboration with the project team and see the influence of their engagement on the project process and outcomes, that trust will then radiate out and encourage broader participation from the community.

## LIMITATIONS

A Steering Committee is not a replacement for engaging the community at large. Although they represent diverse interests and should represent the community well in the make-up of the committee, they are not a holistic substitution. The community should still be given the opportunity to engage in the project process as well and have their voices heard directly.

## INTENDED OUTCOME

- Empower a group of dedicated residents and stakeholders to guide the project process and its outcomes first hand
- Create project champions who help spread awareness of the project and invite their fellow residents and community members to participate
- Establish partners for project implementation
- Develop dedicated quality reviewers who can ensure community feedback is accurately reflected in the final project outcomes

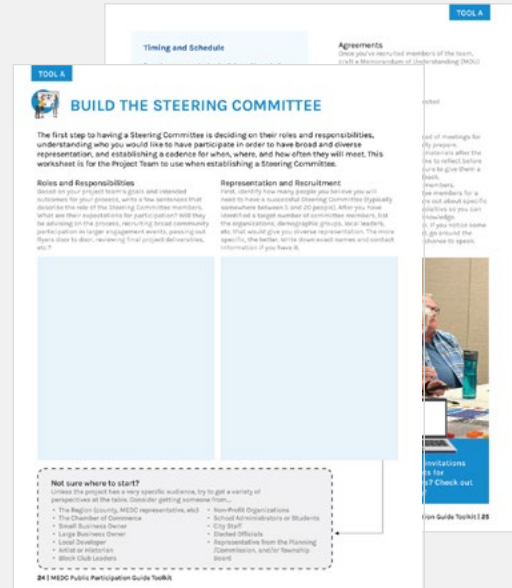
## CLOSE BUT NOT QUITE?

- **Don't like the title?**  
Try a Community Council, Advisory Group, or Co-Building Committee
- **Can't meet regularly enough for a steering committee?**  
Try doing focus groups instead that target specific groups of people (business owners, students, seniors, developers, etc.) and meet with them once or twice during the process to talk about specific topics. While this would shift the engagement goal from Empower to Collaborate, it is still a valuable way to create project champions and empower specific community members to participate in project implementation.

## Included in this Toolkit:

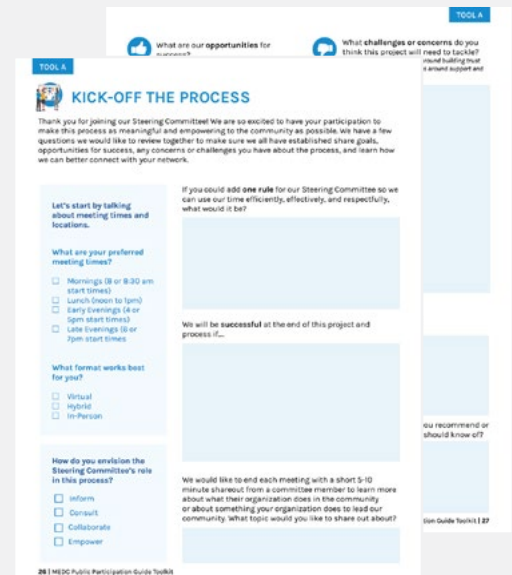
### BUILD THE STEERING COMMITTEE WORKSHEET

Use this worksheet to help you identify who should participate in your Steering Committee, what their roles and responsibilities will be, and how often they will meet.



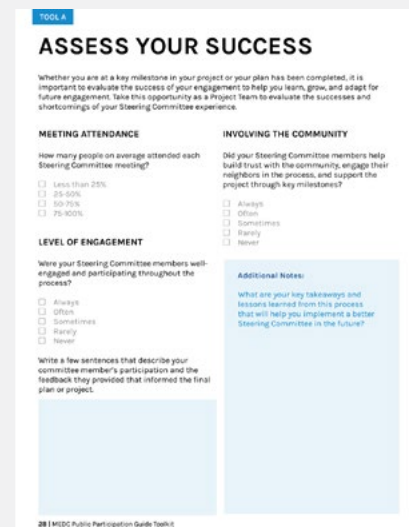
### KICK-OFF THE PROCESS WORKSHEET

Use this worksheet during your Steering Committee's first meeting to help understand their goals, opportunities, potential challenges, and recruitment strategies.



### ASSESS YOUR SUCCESS

Use this worksheet to track your Steering Committee's work and evaluate their success throughout the process. You can utilize this worksheet at key project milestones to hold your team accountable, and at the end of the project to evaluate overall success.





# BUILD THE STEERING COMMITTEE

The first step to having a Steering Committee is deciding their roles and responsibilities, understanding who should participate to have a variety of perspectives on the team and establishing a regular cadence to meet. This worksheet is for the Project Team to use when establishing a Steering Committee.

## GOALS

What is the goal for the Steering Committee (see the goals guide in *Section 2. Get Yourself Started*)?

- Inform
- Involve
- Listen
- Collaborate

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Based on your project team's goals and intended outcomes for your process, write a few sentences that describe the role of the Steering Committee members. What are their expectations for participation? Will they be advising on the process, recruiting broad community participation in larger engagement events, passing out flyers door to door, reviewing final project deliverables, etc.?

## REPRESENTATION AND RECRUITMENT

First, identify how many people you believe you will need to have a successful Steering Committee (typically somewhere between 5 and 20 people). After you have identified a target number of committee members, list the organizations, demographic groups, local leaders, etc. that would give you diverse representation. The more specific, the better. Write down exact names and contact information if you have it.



### Not sure where to start?

Unless the project has a very specific audience, try for a variety of perspectives at the table. Consider getting someone from....

- The Region (county, neighboring townships, etc)
- The Chamber of Commerce
- Small Business Owner
- Large Business Owner
- Local Developer
- Artist or Historian
- Block Club Leaders
- Non-Profit Organizations
- School Administrators or Students
- City Staff
- Elected Officials
- Representative from the Planning Commission, and/or Legislative Body

## TIMING AND SCHEDULE

**Based on your project schedule and targeted milestones, how many meetings should you have to effectively engage and empower your committee members as co-authors in this process?**

**When would most people be available to meet?**

- Mornings (8 or 8:30 am start times)
- Lunch (noon to 1pm)
- Early Evenings (4 or 5pm start times)
- Late Evenings (6 or 7pm start times)

**What format works best for the project team? Confirm this will also work with your Steering Committee in their first kick-off meeting.**

- Virtual
- Hybrid
- In-Person

**If you choose to have in-person or hybrid meetings, what are a few potential locations where you could host your Steering Committee meetings?**



## AGREEMENTS

Once you've recruited members of the team, craft a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that outlines the following:

- Job description
- Schedule and timeline
- Time commitment expected

## TIPS AND TRICKS

People learn in different ways.

- Send short agendas ahead of meetings for those who like to mentally prepare.
- Send copies of meeting materials after the meeting for those who like to reflect before providing feedback.
- Be sure to give them a deadline to get you feedback.

Learn from your committee members.

- You chose your committee members for a reason. Ask them to share out about specific topics, programs, or specialties so you can learn from their expert knowledge.
- Ask for specific feedback.
- If you notice some members are more quiet, go around the room so everyone has a chance to speak.





# KICK-OFF THE PROCESS

Thank you for joining our Steering Committee! We are so excited to have your participation to make this process as meaningful and empowering to the community as possible. We have a few questions we would like to review together to make sure we all have established share goals, opportunities for success, any concerns or challenges you have about the process, and learn how we can better connect with your network.

## Let's talk logistics.

### What are your preferred meeting times?

- Mornings (8 or 8:30 am start times)
- Lunch (noon to 1pm)
- Early Evenings (4 or 5pm start times)
- Late Evenings (6 or 7pm start times)

### What format works best for you?

- Virtual
- Hybrid
- In-Person

We would like to end each meeting with a short 5-10 minute share out from a committee member to learn more about what their organization does in the community or about something your organization does to lead our community. What topic would you like to share out about?

If you could add **one rule** for our Steering Committee so we can use our time efficiently, effectively, and respectfully, what would it be?

We will be **successful** at the end of this project/process if...



What are our **opportunities** for success?



What **challenges or concerns** do you think this project will need to tackle?

*This can include challenges around building trust with the community, concerns around support and participation, etc.*



Who can you reach through **your network** that you would like to see involved in this process? Feel free to list both people and organizations.

Have you noticed any tools are most effective to reach out community members?

Are there any meeting locations you recommend or upcoming community events we should know of?

# ASSESS YOUR SUCCESS

Whether you are at a key milestone in your project or your plan has been completed, it is important to evaluate the success of your engagement to help you learn, grow, and adapt for future engagement. Take this opportunity as a Project Team to evaluate the successes and shortcomings of your Steering Committee experience. Fill this out after each meeting or the end of the process.

## MEETING ATTENDANCE

How many people on average attended each Steering Committee meeting?

- Less than 25%
- 25-50%
- 50-75%
- 75-100%

## LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

Were your Steering Committee members well-engaged and participating throughout the process?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

## INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY

Did your Steering Committee members help build trust with the community, engage their neighbors in the process, and support the project through key milestones?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

What lessons learned will help implement a better Steering Committee in the future?

## WHAT WAS ASKED

Write a few sentences describing what you hoped to learn and what you asked participants.

## WHAT WAS LEARNED

Write a few sentences listing the key takeaways from the community feedback and where to find full results.

## USING COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Write a few sentences describing how that feedback will impact the project.



Wanting to engage your steering committee or community in conversations about specific topics like housing and mobility but not sure where to start? Use the [AARP Livability Workbooks!](#)



# 5. COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS



## GOAL

Community Workshops create a wonderful opportunity to bring a large group of people together, share updates about the process, and engage in a variety of activities to collect feedback on the project. These sessions elevate the voices of the community and offer a chance for the project team and community to engage in a dynamic dialogue that allows ideas to build off of one another, share and validate concerns, and collaborate over solutions together.



## OPPORTUNITIES

The strength and opportunity within Community Workshops is collaboration. When a variety of perspectives come together in one space, the process can facilitate partnership building, increase transparency, accelerate the path to shared ownership, and cultivate a sense of unity around the effort.



## LIMITATIONS

When you invite a large group of people to share ideas, it is easy for a few people to dominate the conversation. A Community Workshop can also become a stage for people to push forward their own agenda to captivate an audience of people who came to listen. The success of Community Workshops depends on allowing all voices to have an equal opportunity to participate in the conversation, and have facilitators prepared to manage multiple personalities. Workshops are also one time, meaning comment members have one shot to attend and miss giving their opinion if they miss it. Be sure you have additional opportunities for people to share their thoughts, such as surveys with the same questions as your event.

## INTENDED OUTCOME

- Hear from a large group of people during one session
- Create camaraderie, community pride, and engaging dialogue between community members and the project team
- Provide space for both project updates and meaningful engagement around a specific topic or project component
- Build a sense of unity around project decisions

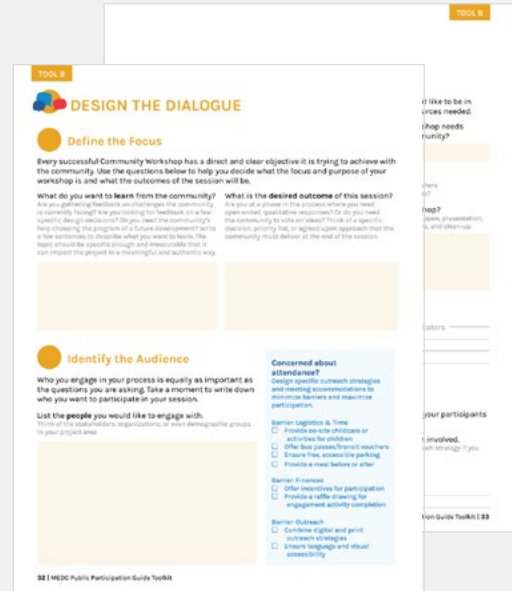
## CLOSE BUT NOT QUITE?

- **Worried people won't come out for a workshop?**  
Start by making sure that you are hosting the event in a place that meets the community where they are and is accessible. Give yourself a few weeks before the workshop to advertise with paper flyers, social media announcements, or ads in the local newsletter. Consider giving community members incentives to come like raffles to a local business or food at the event.
- **Still not sure it will work?**  
You can also try having a pop-up at an existing community event, block club, neighborhood organization meeting, or local festival. Many of the same materials you could use at a workshop could be re-used for a pop-up, but require less printing costs.

Included in this Toolkit:

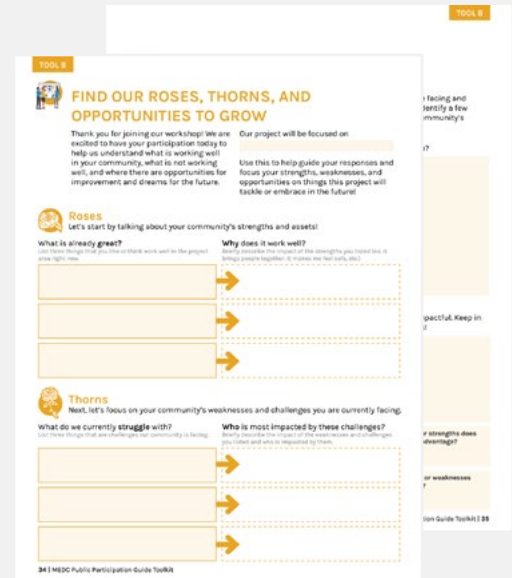
## DESIGN THE DIALOGUE WORKSHEET

Use this worksheet to help your Project Team design and prepare for a successful Community Workshop.



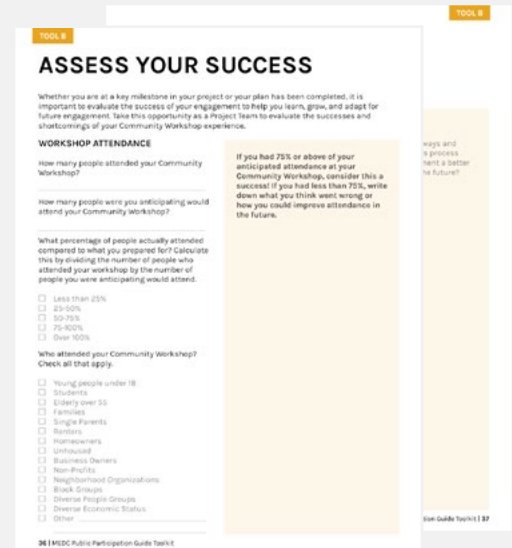
## FIND OUR ROSES, THORNS, AND OPPORTUNITIES TO GROW WORKSHOP ACTIVITY

Community Workshops can cover many topics and tackle many design decisions. This worksheet is a template for a Strengths, Weaknesses, and Opportunities exercise with which to engage the community.



## ASSESS YOUR SUCCESS

Use this worksheet to evaluate your Community Workshop after it is completed. By understanding where you were successful and where you could improve, you can adjust your strategies and outreach before the next Community Workshop.





# DESIGN THE DIALOGUE



## Define the Focus

Every successful Community Workshop has a direct and clear objective it is trying to achieve with the community. Use the questions below to help you decide what the focus and purpose of your workshop is and what the outcomes of the session will be.

What do you want to **learn** from the community?

*Are you gathering feedback on challenges the community is currently facing?*

*Are you looking for feedback on a few specific design decisions? Write a few sentences to describe what you want to learn. The topic should be specific enough and measurable that it can impact the project in a meaningful and authentic way.*



What is the desired **outcome** of this session?

*Are you at a phase in the process where you need open ended, qualitative responses? Or do you need the community to vote on ideas? Think of a specific decision, priority list, or agreed upon approach that the community must deliver at the end of the session.*






# Identify the Audience



Who you engage in your process is equally as important as the questions you are asking. Take a moment to write down who you want to participate in your session.

List the **people** you would like to engage with.  
*Think of the stakeholders, organizations, or demographic groups in your project area.*

What **questions** would they have for you?  
How could you address them?  
*E.g. A group of residents from your local biking group are likely to attend so you have a station about biking routes in the study area.*

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## Solve Your Logistics

Now that you know the purpose of your Community Workshop and who you would like to be in attendance, bring your workshop to life by identifying the meeting flow and resources needed.

What is the best day and time to maximize attendance?

What venues would meet your workshop needs and be most accessible to the community?

What is your workshop format?

An open house where people can arrive at any time

A sit down event with a presentation where everyone has to arrive at the same time

What will be your engagement activity?

*Try to focus on just 1-3 activities.*

What is the schedule for your workshop?

*Outline the time needed for the prep, doors open, presentation, activity, and next steps, question & answers, and clean-up.*

What materials will you need to execute your engagement successfully?

- Presentation Screen
- Projector
- Microphone
- Tables and Chairs
- Pens and Markers
- Large Easel Pads
- Easels

- Printed Informational Boards or Maps
- Sticky Notes
- Stickers
- Clipboards
- Facilitators (Number \_\_\_\_\_)

Other Materials



## Propose Strategies for Outreach

You've put so much time and effort into structuring this session - now you need your participants to collaborate with! Use this section to outline your outreach strategy.

Identify strategies for how you can best reach these groups of people to get them involved.

*Some groups might require targeted outreach strategies, so write down those specifics next to each strategy if you need to.*

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Printed Flyers                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Direct Emails                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Door Knocking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social Media Campaign                | <input type="checkbox"/> Direct Mailers                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Other         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Announcement in the Local Newsletter | <input type="checkbox"/> Ad on the Local Radio/Local-Access TV |  |

## CONCERNED ABOUT ATTENDANCE?

Design specific outreach strategies and meeting accommodations to minimize barriers and maximize participation.



### Barrier: Logistics & Time

- Provide on-site childcare or activities for children
- Offer bus passes/transit vouchers
- Ensure free, accessible parking
- Provide food

*Tip: While we recommend doing a meal if your event is during dinner/lunch time, it could be something much more simple - and cheap - such as snacks or ice pops.*



### Barrier: Finances

- Offer incentives for participation (raffles for gift cards to local businesses, spots in a parks and recreation summer program, or swag such as stickers and water bottles\_
- Provide a raffle drawing for engagement activity completion



### Barrier: Outreach

- Combine digital and print outreach strategies
- Consider the generation and target your outreach to them. *Struggling with youth? Try targeted ads on gaming systems or spotlights in the school newsletter. Struggling to hear from seniors? Consider sessions at senior centers.*
- Ensure language and visual accessibility



# FIND OUR ROSES, THORNS, AND OPPORTUNITIES TO GROW

Thank you for joining our workshop! We are excited to have your participation today to help us understand what is working well in your community, what is not working well, and where there are opportunities for improvement and dreams for the future.

Our project will be focused on

Use this to help guide your responses and focus your strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities on things this project will tackle or embrace in the future!



## Roses

Let's start by talking about our community's strengths and assets!

### What is already **great**?

List three things that you like or think work well in the project area right now.

### Why does it work well?

Briefly describe the impact of the strengths you listed (ex: it brings people together, it makes me feel safe, etc.)



## Thorns

Next, let's focus on the weaknesses and challenges our community is currently facing.

### What do we currently **struggle** with?

List three things that are challenges our community is facing.

### Who is most impacted by these challenges?

Briefly describe the impact of the weaknesses and challenges you listed and who is impacted by them.





## Opportunities To Grow

Our goal is that this project will be able to address many of the challenges we are facing and celebrate what is already going well in our community. Let's use this section to identify a few creative and practical ideas that are opportunities for this project to solve our community's concerns and uplift its successes.

What potential solutions and strategies would you like to see this project explore?

Choose the top three solutions you've discussed from most impactful to least impactful. Keep in mind, these could be your ideas or you could be inspired by someone else's ideas!

Idea #1	Idea #2	Idea #3
<p>What roses or strengths does it use to its advantage?</p>	<p>What roses or strengths does it use to its advantage?</p>	<p>What roses or strengths does it use to its advantage?</p>
<p>What thorns or weaknesses does it solve?</p>	<p>What thorns or weaknesses does it solve?</p>	<p>What thorns or weaknesses does it solve?</p>

# ASSESS YOUR SUCCESS

Whether you are at a key milestone in your project or your plan has been completed, it is important to evaluate the success of your engagement to help you learn, grow, and adapt for future engagement. Take this opportunity as a Project Team to evaluate the successes and shortcomings of your Community Workshop experience.

## WORKSHOP ATTENDANCE

How many people attended your Community Workshop?

---

How many people were you anticipating would attend your Community Workshop?

---

What percentage of people actually attended compared to what you prepared for? (Calculate this by dividing the number of people who attended your workshop by the number of people you were anticipating would attend.)

- Less than 25%
- 25-50%
- 50-75%
- 75-100%
- Over 100%

Who attended your Community Workshop?  
Check all that apply.

- Young people under 18
- Students
- Elderly over 55
- Families
- Single Parents
- Renters
- Homeowners
- Unhoused
- Business Owners
- Non-Profits
- Neighborhood Organizations
- Block Groups
- Diverse People Groups
- Diverse Economic Status
- Other

**If you had 75% or above of your anticipated attendance at your Community Workshop, consider this a success! If you had less than 75%, write down what you think went wrong or how you could improve attendance in the future.**

### Additional Notes:

What are your key takeaways and lessons learned from this process that will help you implement a better Community Workshop in the future?

## MEETING OUTREACH

What outreach methods did you use to spread the word about your Community Workshop?

- Printed Flyers
- Social Media Campaign
- Announcement in the Local Newsletter
- Direct Emails
- Direct Mailers
- Ad on the Local Radio/TV
- Door Knocking
- Other

## LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

Were people well-engaged and participating throughout the Community Workshop?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

## WHAT WAS ASKED

Write a few sentences describing what you hoped to learn and what you asked participants.

## WHAT WAS LEARNED

Write a few sentences listing the key takeaways from the community feedback and where to find full results.

## USING COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Write a few sentences describing how that feedback will impact the project.

# 6. MULTI-PAGE SURVEYS



## GOAL

Community Surveys provide a great opportunity for project teams to establish baseline community needs, assess overall priorities, and gather structured feedback on specific planning ideas, ensuring that decision-making is data-driven and reflects the input of a wide range of voices.



## OPPORTUNITIES

Community Surveys, whether printed or digital and no matter the length, can gather large volumes of responses, ideas, and feedback from a wide range of people. They are intended to be a low-barrier-to-participation tool that community members can quickly and easily fill out to ensure that their voice is represented in a public participation process, without having to attend a lengthy workshop or participate on a steering committee.



## LIMITATIONS

Despite their reach, surveys can often lack the depth and nuanced dialogue present in steering committees, focus groups, and community workshops. Participants are filling out their responses in isolation from others, and although this means that they are not influenced by the feedback of others, it also limits the opportunity to learn from others ideas and experiences. Surveys also require careful design of questions to gather meaningful feedback without leading participants to a particular response or misrepresenting data. Lastly, surveys are such an easy and frequently-used tool that communities can experience survey fatigue, leading to low participation or quick responses that lack depth and authenticity.

## INTENDED OUTCOME

- Gather a large volume of responses on a few key, targeted questions
- Reach an audience of individuals who may not be able to attend in-person engagement events, but would still like to participate in the process
- Provide an accessible option for those unable to attend in-person engagement

## CLOSE BUT NOT QUITE?

- **Worried about participation?**  
Make your survey as direct, simple, and user-friendly as you can to encourage participation. Limit the response time to 10 or 15 minutes so that people are willing to respond without feeling like it is a burden or interruption to their day.
- **Concerned about accessibility?**  
It is important to understand your audience and evaluate their access to the internet. If your community has strong internet access, then digital surveys that are distributed via email blast and social media are a great option to keep costs down and encourage wide participation. If you are concerned about accessibility, consider printed surveys that are available at frequently visited community locations, like libraries, schools, etc. for distribution and collection.

Included in this Toolkit:

**DESIGN THE SURVEY WORKSHEET**

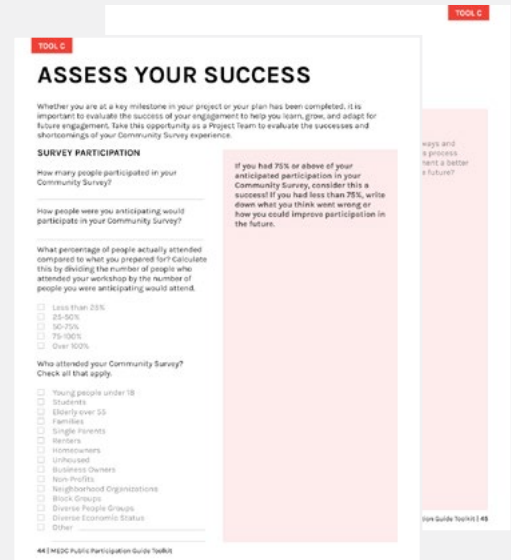
Use this worksheet to help your Project Team design and prepare a successful Community Survey. Note this is not the same as a statistically significant survey.



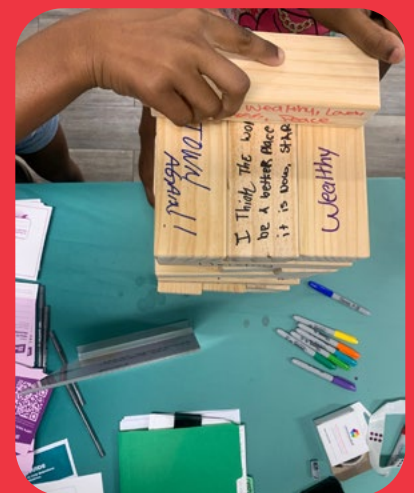
**ASSESS YOUR SUCCESS**

Use this worksheet to evaluate your Community Survey after it is completed. By understanding where you were successful and where you could improve, you can adjust your strategies and outreach before the next Community Survey.

Remember, not all community surveys need to be statistically significant - a 20% response rate can be great!



Turn some of your survey questions into interactive activities at community events, like here where people write their vision for a neighborhood plan on a Jenga piece!





## DESIGN YOUR SURVEY

Successful Community Surveys depend on the ease of responses, directness of questions, and actionable outcomes for a project. Use the questions below to help you better understand your audience, collect important information about your participants, structure your questions for optimal responses, and navigate survey fatigue.

### Understand Your Audience

Deciding which demographic questions to include and how to phrase them is crucial for ensuring equity and understanding how responses received may or may not correlate to the conditions of the people offering those responses. By asking demographic questions, you are able to both understand whether specific groups of people were represented in responses received and whether or not their priorities differed from one another.

Identify the demographic factors that are relevant to your project and engagement goals.

Do you have programming that will be focused on child and youth services? Are you looking to provide workforce training for unemployed adults? Does your project have specific accessibility concerns?

- Age
- Gender
- Race/Ethnicity
- Language
- Income Level
- Employment Status
- Education
- Disability Status
- Housing Situation
- Other



Here, a team member sits with a community member to help them fill out a paper survey.



#### Demographic information is sensitive and deeply personal.

Having demographic questions in a survey can make some participants hesitant to respond for fear their race, gender, income, etc. will be used against them or to identify them in a harmful way. Because of this, it is important that you make sure participants are aware of how you will be using this information to influence your project outcomes.

- Consider adding a statement about why you are collecting this information and how you will use it, like *“The following questions are OPTIONAL and ANONYMOUS. We use these responses to understand who we are reaching, who is participating, and how to ensure we are reaching the full range of people in our city.”*
- Place these at the end of your survey, not the beginning.
- Make demographic questions optional.
- Keep all responses confidential.
- Ensure that there are no personal privacy laws in your state or jurisdiction that prevent you from asking demographic questions.

## Write Strong Survey Questions

- Is the language simple and jargon-free?**  
 Would a middle school student, a non-native speaker, or elderly community member all understand what the question is asking for? If not, how can you reduce planning jargon or define key terms to help everyone understand what you are asking for?
- Does the question ask only one thing?**  
 Are you asking for multiple points of feedback in one question? Is it possible that a participant could agree with one half of the question, but disagree or have feedback with the second half? If so, consider splitting one question into multiple questions to help gather discreet feedback.
- Is the question leading or biased?**  
 Are you giving away your project team's preferences, while also leading the participant to one response over another? Remember, you are here to gather their feedback. Remove your bias where you can, and communicate limitations as needed to explain the available choices.
- Are there overlaps between answer choices?**  
 Make sure each response is clear and distinct from one another. Avoid combining potential responses - for example, rather than having one answer choice be "Parks and Open Spaces," separate this into individual "Parks" and "Open Spaces" answer choices.
- Could the question be quantitative instead of qualitative?**  
 Qualitative information, while very valuable, can take more time to properly analyze and requires multiple reviewers to try and eliminate a biased assessment of results. See if the question can be quantitative instead. Can the results be easily tabulated as a number?



### QUALITATIVE INSTEAD OF THIS...

How do you feel our economy is in the City?



### QUANTIFIABLE ...ASK THIS

How close are we to having an economy that provides enough good-paying jobs for residents to afford living in our city?

- 1 - Not close at all
- 2 - Slight progress
- 3 - Moderate progress
- 4 - Very close
- 5 - Fully achieved

## Combat Survey Fatigue

Because of the popularity of surveys, it is easy for communities to become bored and exhausted from providing their feedback in this format. This can lead to lower response rates, poor responses, and a negative perception of the project team or organization engaging with the community. Consider these rules of thumb and questions to ask the project team when developing the survey and asking the community to respond.

### SURVEY LENGTH

What We Hear from Communities

"This survey is going to take way too long for me to finish, so I'm not going to do it."



#### Our Solution:

Surveys are best when they take 5 to 10 minutes to complete. If your survey is longer than this, consider reducing the number of questions for better response rates. Also, on the intro page of the survey, let participants know about how much time they can anticipate spending on the survey. This way they feel encouraged to participate if they know it will not take long.

### SURVEY RELEVANCE

What We Hear from Communities

"So many of these questions don't even apply to me, so why should I waste my time filling them out?"



#### Our Solution:

Evaluate your questions to understand what is "good-to-know" versus "need-to-know" for your decision-making and make those "good-to-know" questions optional for participants. That way people can adjust how many questions they answer based on the time they have to spend taking the survey. Use "skip logic" strategically so that the questions in the survey react to respondents' previous answers. If they answer "no" to a question about being a business owner in their community, then any question that follows about their experience or concerns as a business owner are not relevant to them and should be hidden if possible.

## SURVEY LENGTH

What We Hear from Communities

"I've already taken so many surveys on this topic and seen no results. Why should I take another?"



### Our Solution:

Be clear and honest up front with your intentions. Recognize the value of your participants' time and demonstrate how you are using the feedback of other initiatives to also influence your responses. And if your project budget can afford it, offer incentives for completion! Enter participants into a raffle, partner with local organizations so that participants can receive discount coupons, or use an engagement passport to track participation and offer rewards for full participation.

## SURVEY PLATFORM

What We Hear from Communities

"There are so many platforms - which one should I use?"



### Our Solution:

There's no wrong answer! Use what you are most comfortable with.

- Google Forms and Microsoft Forms are common for communities with accounts.
- ArcGIS Survey123 is handy for communities with ArcGIS Online Accounts who want to add mapping questions to their surveys.
- Mentimeter and Poll Everywhere allow you to ask survey questions during presentations and get live results.

## Check Out Some Template Questions

### CREATE A VISIONING QUESTION

#### Starting from Scratch

Don't have a vision statement already?  
Try one of these:

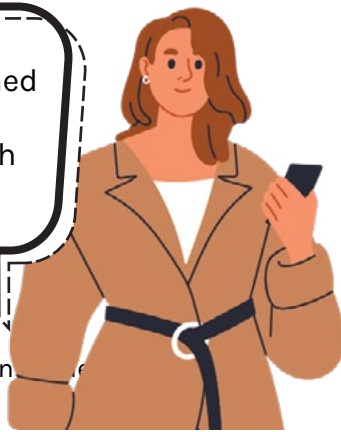
- If I had to describe our community today in one word, it would be \_\_\_\_\_.
- If I had to describe how I hope our community will be in the future in one word, it would be \_\_\_\_\_.
- This project will be successful if it ends with \_\_\_\_\_.

#### Basing it off a Prior Vision Statement

Already have a vision statement but want to double check it? Share the vision statement and ask questions like these:

- On a scale of 1 to 5, how well does this still represent what our vision for the future should be?
  - 1. Very well
  - 2. Somewhat well
  - 3. Neutral
  - 4. Somewhat poorly
  - 5. Very poorly
- What is missing?
- What still makes sense for us/this project?

"We need to get aligned on what we are all hoping to accomplish here."



### SHARE QUESTIONS ABOUT GOALS

#### Have them Help Prioritize

Share a list of 10-15 top goals or priorities for the project and ask the following questions.

- While we aim to create the best project possible, we often times have to make tough choices about what to invest in first given funding, staff capacity, and available resources. What are the **top three goals** or priorities you think we should invest in first?
  - Is anything missing from this list?
    - No
    - Yes (please specify)

#### Get Feedback on Goals

Already have a short list of prior goals you want to vet? Share each goal individually and ask questions like these:

- How close are we to accomplishing this goal?
  - 1. We have a lot of work to do
  - 2. We have some work to do
  - 3. We are doing ok
  - 4. We are doing well
  - 5. We are doing great
- What would we have to do to get a perfect score? *(only show this if they score a 3 or lower)*

"We need to figure out what we should even do first."



## ASK ABOUT DEMOGRAPHICS

### Ask Demographics

Be sure to label these as optional.

- **OPTIONAL** Are you a member of any city clubs or community organizations.
  - List known entities here
  - Other (please specify)
  - None
- **OPTIONAL** Please share your race/ethnicity (check all that apply).
  - Asian
  - American Indian/Native American
  - Black/African American
  - Middle Eastern/North African
  - Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
  - White/Caucasian
  - Latino/Hispanic
  - Other/Not Listed
- **OPTIONAL** Please share your age.
  - Under 18
  - 18-65
  - Over 65
- **OPTIONAL** Please share your income.
  - Less than \$24,999
  - \$25,000-34,999
  - \$35,000-49,999
  - \$50,000-74,999
  - \$75,000-99,999
  - \$100,000-149,999
  - \$150,000 or more

Other questions you could ask to better understand who you've reached would be which area of the city they live in (share a map with numbered zones for them to pick from or ask their ZIP code). You could also ask additional census questions like if they own or rent.



# ASSESS YOUR SUCCESS

Whether you are at a key milestone in your project or your plan has been completed, it is important to evaluate the success of your engagement to help you learn, grow, and adapt for future engagement. Take this opportunity as a Project Team to evaluate the successes and shortcomings of your Community Survey experience.

## SURVEY PARTICIPATION

How many people participated in your Community Survey?

---

How many people were you anticipating would participate in your Community Survey?

---

What percentage of people in your community or study area took the survey? (Tip: The typical rule of thumb tends to be 20%.)

- Less than 5%
- 5-10%
- 11-15%
- 16-20%
- Over 20%

Who completed your Community Survey?  
Check all that apply.

- Young people under 18
- Students
- Elderly over 55
- Families
- Single Parents
- Renters
- Homeowners
- Unhoused
- Business Owners
- Non-Profits
- Neighborhood Organizations
- Block Groups
- Diverse People Groups
- Diverse Economic Status
- Other

**If you had 20% or above of your audience participation in your Community Survey, consider this a success! If you had less than 20%, write down how you think you could improve participation in the future.**

### Additional Notes:

What are your key takeaways and lessons learned from this process that will help you implement a better Community Workshop in the future?

## MEETING OUTREACH

What outreach methods did you use to spread the word about your Community Workshop?

- Printed Flyers
- Social Media Campaign
- Announcement in the Local Newsletter
- Direct Emails
- Direct Mailers
- Ad on the Local Radio/TV
- Door Knocking
- Other

## LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

Were people answering all of the questions and providing well-thought out responses?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

## WHAT WAS ASKED

Write a few sentences describing what you hoped to learn and what you asked participants.

## WHAT WAS LEARNED

Write a few sentences listing the key takeaways from the community feedback and where to find full results.

## USING COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Write a few sentences describing how that feedback will impact the project.

# 7. REPORT OUT

The Redevelopment Ready Communities Best Practices encourage communities to provide an update on engagement activity to the governing body at least annually. Use this guide as a self-assessment tool to evaluate success each year and report out.

## OUTREACH

(1 point per checkmark)

What engagement formats were used?

- Virtual
- In-person
- Hybrid
- Remote (e.g. Meeting in a box)
- Social media

Which specific community groups did we reach?

- Students
- Youth under 18
- Elderly over 75
- Low-income
- Multiple races/ethnicities
- People without car access
- Renters
- Unhoused
- Business owners
- Non-profits
- Specific cultural groups
- Block clubs/neighborhood groups
- Other:

Was there any follow-up?

- Reported results
- Reported attendance
- Had follow up conversations
- Other:

## EFFECTIVENESS

(1 point per checkmark)

How was input used?

- Informed plan priorities
- Informed policies or recommendations
- Informed design

Total Score:

**15-25:** You are doing things in partnership with community members! Keep going and share your learning.

**10-15:** You're doing well. Review sections with lower scores and focus on strengthening those areas.

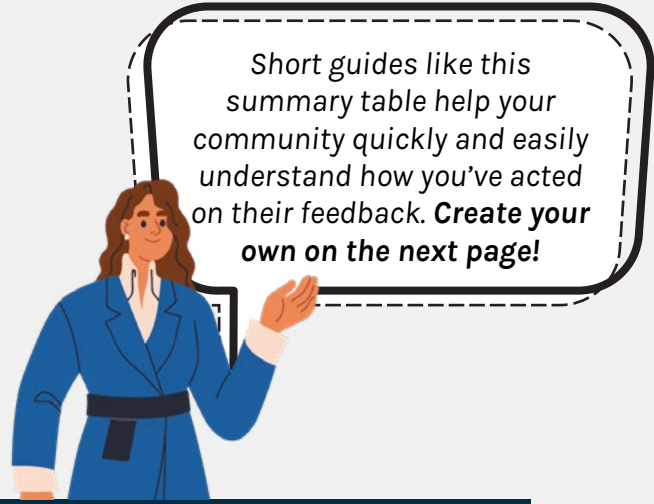
**5-10:** You're heading in the right direction if your goal is to inform community members but may benefit from a different engagement approach if your goal is to listen, involve, or collaborate.

**Below 5:** Time to rethink your engagement model and try some new tools.



## SAMPLE “WHAT WE HEARD” SUMMARY

From Month XXXX to Month XXX, the City of XXXXX gathered input through a citywide survey to understand residents’ experiences today and their priorities for the future. A total of XXX residents participated, with a strong XX% completion rate, and XX% of respondents live in the community, providing a reliable picture of local perspectives. Survey participants were primarily ages XX-XX and long term residents with household incomes most commonly between \$XX,XXX and \$XXX,XX, closely reflecting the city’s broader demographics.



### WHAT THE COMMUNITY SAID

Survey respondents highlighted a strong desire for vibrant, walkable downtown with diverse businesses, cultural amenities, and social spaces.

*XX% of survey respondents said they would choose Downtown to invest in first, out of 10 different options.*

Access to parks, open spaces, and natural features is highly valued, with strong interest in trails and recreational amenities.

*When asked what our strengths were, our parks were the top answer mentioned XX times.*

Traffic congestion, especially on Main Street, along with sidewalk gaps and safety concerns, were among the most frequently cited challenges.

*When asked what our challenges were, traffic was mentioned most (XX times).*

Residents expressed concern about housing affordability, housing costs, and limited options for seniors and younger households.

*When asked what their biggest concern is for the future, affordability was mentioned most (XX times).*

Respondents want more local businesses, entertainment, and amenities and expressed concern about competitiveness with nearby communities.

### HOW THIS PROJECT RESPONDS

The plan prioritizes Downtown reinvestment, focusing on walkability, redevelopment of vacant sites, improved streetscapes, and support for a mix of businesses and uses.

*See Chapter 2*

The plan calls for continued investment in parks, trails, and recreation to support access, programming, and quality of life improvements.

*See Chapter 3*

The plan emphasizes safer and more connected mobility through improvements to streets, sidewalks, crossings, and traffic management.

*See Chapter 4*

The plan guides housing policies and land use strategies to support a broader range of housing options while maintaining neighborhood stability.

*See Chapter 5*

The plan supports economic development and placemaking strategies that strengthen local identity and attract a diverse mix of businesses and activities.

Note: See the attachment for the raw survey results. This section only provides an overview results and how this project incorporated that feedback.

## WHAT WE HEARD

**WHAT THE  
COMMUNITY SAID**

**HOW THIS  
PROJECT RESPONDS**

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Note: See the attachment for the raw engagement activity results. This section only provides an overview results and how this project incorporated that feedback.

# WANT MORE?

CHECK OUT MEDC'S REDEVELOPMENT  
READY COMMUNITIES BEST PRACTICES

