

THE PRINCIPLES OF EQUITABLE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Embracing the Gifts of Diversity

Building strong communities starts with recognizing the power that already exists in undervalued or ignored people and neighborhoods; however, some people are repeatedly not invited to identify, develop, and share their gifts. A healthy and equitable civic engagement environment is one that is built around the creative gifts of community members - all community members.

Embracing the Gifts of Diversity means:

- Understanding that communities are comprised of a myriad of people, ideas, and motivations;
- Using social capital to build bridges between diverse community members;
- Valuing all levels of community engagement, from large scale to small scale; and
- Supporting and using diverse sources of community leadership.

Hospitality: Invitation & Listening

Building communities where everyone feels a sense of belonging and ownership does not happen accidentally. Inclusion needs to be intentional, particularly in the case of the most vulnerable members of our communities. Welcoming diverse voices into our community conversations requires more than a cursory invitation to join a meeting or event. The invitation must reflect the needs and concerns of the community member - they must see the issues important to them on the agenda. *Hospitality: Invitation & Listening* means:

- Possessing a determined dedication to inclusion and a commitment that when the community comes together, everyone is represented;
- Listening with the intention of truly understanding your neighbors, their backgrounds and their concerns;
- Engaging neighbors within a frame of shared destiny access to opportunity for all, and
- Cultivating a sense of belongingness among all community members.

Realizing the Role of Race, Power and Injustice

Acknowledging the life experiences of our neighbors is often an important part of ensuring that they feel welcomed in the community. Discrimination, marginalization, and unequal power dynamics have played a central role in shaping many of the habits and relationships in our communities. If you live in a community where people are friendly and the environment is safe and healthy, you may see a community as a warm, open, and safe place. However, if you've experienced discrimination at a grocery store or a misunderstanding between neighbors from different backgrounds, it may create a different picture. In order to build an inclusive community engagement environment, we cannot afford to marginalize the experiences of our neighbors. *Realizing the Role of Power and Injustice* means:

- Acknowledging the historical inequities in our communities
- Recognition of the role that stereotypes and cultural assumptions play in our community engagement activities

- Understanding that structural power imbalances have an important impact how individuals engage in their community; and
- Effectively planning to constructively approach the conflicts that arise in sharing community power.

Building Trust Through Empowerment

Solving long-term community problems requires community members willing to build long-lasting partnerships. Trust is the glue that holds these bonds together. Strong communities are built on a foundation of trust and mutual respect. If community members cannot trust one another, they cannot build a community together. Trust is built by forging relationships based on mutual support. *Trust-Building & Commitment* means:

- Making and keeping promises;
- Building trust by building empowerment, and
- Understanding that mutual accountability is vital to community engagement.

Honoring Disagreement and Dissent

The strength of the diversity in our communities relies on our ability to accept and respect our difference. In strong communities, voices of disagreement can actually strengthen the civic engagement environment by offering alternatives and raising tough questions. By truly honoring dissent, we can create a civic engagement environment where our rich blend of ideas can be brought together to build communities that are more than the sum of their parts. *Honoring Dissent and Embracing Protest* mean:

- Embracing difficult conversations in a compassionate and respectful manner;
- Bearing the tension of disagreement in a spirit of community and open communication while staying dedicated to the underlying goal of restoring your communities; and
- Acknowledging protest as a valid expression of civic voice and engagement.

Adaptability to Community Change

Change is difficult for many of us. Yet our communities are constantly changing. Neighbors and businesses move in and move on, new technologies and new neighbors change the way that we communicate and alter how we define our “community.” In order to respond to these changes, the community engagement environment must be flexible and provide space for people work through transitions. *Adaptability to Community Change* means:

- Being flexible and open to community changes,
- Confronting the challenges of changing community dynamics, and
- Understanding that community change is a challenging journey for everyone.