

*Direct participation in projects, policies, and development that affect historically marginalized communities takes initial upfront investment to build capacity to strengthen democratic processes; however, it will yield an increase in local capacity for self-determination and increased influence.<sup>67</sup>*

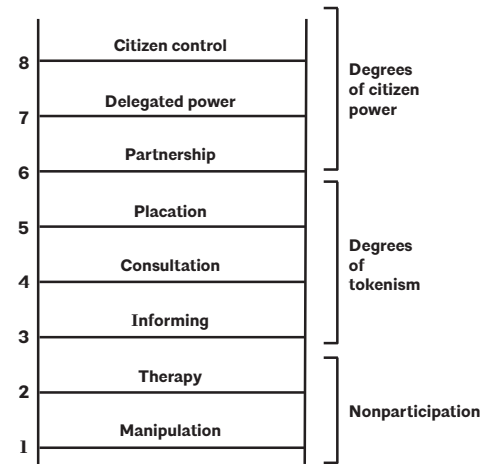
## PRE-DESIGN & ENGAGEMENT

### Involving community: Neighbors as co-creators

Involving community members in a meaningful way is still possible even if the contract is signed. The earlier community members and stakeholders can be involved, the more opportunity they have to shape the design. It's important to be specific about the degree of influence and areas of impact community members might expect to have, the current phase or status of the project, and how the feedback will be used. In addition, reporting back to community members following application of the feedback, before the project begins construction, signals transparency and builds trust in the design team and owner. Spectrums of participation, such as **Sherry Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation**, provide useful clarity about the goals and types of community participation that are possible.

Once you have determined what level of participation you are able to offer to community members, map out a community participation strategy with key stakeholders. Their insights are invaluable as the process unfolds. Consider what questions you want to answer or what topics you'd like to know more about. Be specific about the knowledge you seek and be clear about your goals for community involvement. Authentic community engagement is more than picking the color of furniture or look of the building, it's weaving community priorities and needs into all aspects of the project. Communication and feedback loops are important to establish early. Active listening and communicating back to stakeholders and participants to confirm your analysis, articulate outcomes, and share new limitations or opportunities will be critical.

Bringing stakeholders together across the course of a project builds relationships and capacity. Consider how the project team might sustain momentum from the initial engagement process through project completion. Facilitating the creation of or partnership with a community organization helps the client and project team navigate complex community needs and desires and ultimately contributes to community power beyond the end of a project. Another positive outcome for the client may include supporters who later help to secure funding from municipal bonds or provide political support to help finance future phases and added public amenities or improve the approval process for future projects. Grants and other publicly funded incentive programs are often available to support the creation of community organizations, preventing the project owner from bearing the entire cost.



Sherry Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation featuring 8 rungs ranging from no power (Nonparticipation), counterfeit power (Degrees of Tokenism), and actual power (Degrees of Citizen Power). Credit: *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 1969

### IN PRACTICE

When approaching potential new projects, Melissa Lee, with New Orleans-based firm Concordia, goes "beyond 'do no harm' and looks at promoting Black generational wealth." As the firm makes project selection decisions, they consider "does this project support our firmwide goal to promote Black generational wealth?"

**Firm:** Concordia

**Leadership:** Steven Bingler, Bobbie Hill

**Number of employees:** <20

**Base location:** New Orleans, LA

**Known for:** community engagement

### LEARN MORE:

- » [The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership](#) developed by Rosa González of Facilitating Power
- » [NAACP Guidelines for Equitable Community Involvement in Building & Development Projects and Policies](#)
- » [Institute of Cultural Affairs' Technology of Participation](#)

[Building to Heal: A Framework for Holistic Community Development](#), Enterprise Community Partners

If this is outside your firm's area of expertise, bring on a consultant to support your efforts. Additional community outreach, stipends for participation, and engagement consultants can be added to a contract. Colloqate Design is bringing on community design advocates.<sup>65</sup>

By collaborating directly with community design advocates or general outreach through early engagement, communities are afforded a voice and seat at the table, allowing for a rich synergy of conversation across all levels of stakeholder engagement. Engaging stakeholders at all levels in the early stages of project discovery lays the foundations for strong working relationships, on both personal and professional levels, which can initiate trust and overall comfort for the community throughout the project life cycle. Trust, comfort, and agency are key and pivotal outcomes of early community engagement, as majority approval, or buy-in is typically required for advancing through municipal processes associated with re-development.

**Consider:**

1. At the beginning of a project, outline the scope for community involvement and include key stakeholders in creating an engagement strategy. Be clear about what you are seeking and how much influence community feedback will have.
2. Research the local community to learn about the important groups, local leaders and influencers, and important organizations and businesses in the area. Consider partnering with these groups for meaningful engagement. Keep in mind that community members may have experienced inauthentic engagement previously and might be reluctant to trust you. Community partners will be vital in determining how best to convene groups from the community, how to communicate out, and when/where to hold meetings. Not all community groups are broadly representative of the communities they serve. Consider who is missing from conversations and seek them out as well.

3. Support the formation of an advisory group that is representative of the community (see previous section, "Involving Community: Stakeholder Advisory Groups") and work with the client to think about how this group would continue to be involved after construction finishes. Compensation for the advisory group and other partners will be necessary to avoid exhausting their good will.

4. Be transparent with data use (including if the session will be recorded or what the sign-in sheet information will be used for). Use a range of methods, from anonymous surveys and one-on-one conversations to large-group workshops, to ensure participation is fully and equally representative. See more on this topic in "Involving community: Outreach & engagement."

### Involving community: Defining success & principles

A co-created set of project goals, desired outcomes, and principles are helpful to establish early in the community engagement process. This builds trust between the project team and community members and creates alignment around performance indicators that should guide the design process and shape the project.

Respecting community members and end users as authorities on their needs and neighborhood flips the narrative from community-as-recipients to community-as-experts who project teams then value as partners. Early community consideration can save the client time and money in design and engineering due to community concerns and dictated changes to project planning and design.

These goals will be used to make decisions from conceptual design through value engineering and construction administration. Judith Hoskens, formerly of Cuningham Group Architecture and currently a partner at BNDRY Studio, leverages community-created goals and principles in her work related to material selection.

### IN PRACTICE

Sheba Ross, Global Practice Director, Cities and Communities at HKS Architects, uses GIS mapping to identify gaps in community assets and match vacant or underutilized parcels to the need. This allows her team to consider how a project could begin to fill needs or how they might reframe the design question to help the client understand the opportunities at hand. She notes that large projects often have the space to redefine the problem before seeking a solution.

In the StationSoccer project, Sheba's team explored opportunities to install soccer fields and supportive amenities with the goal of increasing areas for play and recreation. Their data-based investigation in one area found a severe lack of broadband access. The team learned that children would play, then go to the closest McDonald's to access the internet to do homework. The HKS team shifted the design response to meet recreational, educational, social, and infrastructural needs. Their new look at the issues through data gathering yielded the recommendation to install Wi-Fi-enabled, decommissioned train cars next to the fields.

**Firm:** HKS Architects

**Leadership:** Dan Noble

**Number of employees:** >1,400

**Base Location:** Dallas, TX

**Known for:** data-driven approach, creatively multidisciplinary teams

As a matter of principle and to directly benefit the community, Hoskens strives to use materials created locally or by manufacturers employing local people. She also highlights the criticality of preserving key items in the design that are important to the community and preventing them from being removed in the value engineering process. Hoskens underscores that bringing local students into all phases of the design process can bolster creativity. They can also help measure project success post-occupancy by evaluating key performance indicators previously established with the community.

**Consider:**

1. Once community goals and design principles are established, agree on indicators to monitor progress.
2. Depending on the indicator, outline proper time frames. Some goals might be immediate (e.g., number of local people hired for construction) and some might be long term (e.g., reduction in violence and crime or improved health outcomes through lighting strategies or building façade systems).
3. Ensure resources are allocated toward monitoring and evaluation of goal progress. If a client is not willing, or cannot afford to fund ongoing services, consider partnering with a university, public entity, or other research institution or apply for a grant to support these activities. A large firm might allocate research and development resources for research to cover the costs. Smaller firms can leverage their local relationship with municipalities, local libraries and open-source GIS data, and universities to bring such resources to bear.
4. Ensure the data and research is accessible to your partner groups to build trust through transparency and confirm how their input has shaped the project. Consider open-source platforms or a Creative Commons license for findings.

### Involving community: Outreach & engagement

Large-scale public visioning sessions and charettes still have a role in community processes, but to be more inclusive and equitable, it is important to meet people where they are at. Outreach methods in physical and digital spaces include meetings, forums, small group conversations, phone calls, text Q+A, and WhatsApp groups. Methods should be both active and passive to strive for diverse representation. Format and language will be contextual to the people and place in which the project is located.

Tools, such as surveys, interviews, visioning activities, and co-design activities, can be mapped across communication and outreach methods. Kia Weatherspoon, of Determined by Design, avoids single engagements. Instead, she plans tiered community events at a variety of scales, including more intimate settings for conversations that feel more comfortable. She's also found that she can connect with community members through property managers and resident services coordinators. Local schools are also effective ways to reach young people. Weatherspoon sees this as an opportunity to inform projects and to introduce young people to design. Project design and construction internships are another chance to expose young people to the design industry and they double as community engagement. Her commitment to engagement is rooted in a belief in the people to whom she is speaking with. People outside the design professions bring a fresh perspective to projects and can think differently about the process.

Trusted community members, local organizations, and neighborhood influencers all have a sense of how best to communicate and what barriers might be in place.

Bringing their expertise to planning meetings to establish how outreach and engagement on a project will take place will increase the likelihood of successful and authentic engagement.

It is important to plan ahead for how you will compensate for community involvement and participation. Community expertise is valuable, and that should be recognized formally. There are many ways to go about compensating people for their time and participation, including direct financial compensation in the form of a stipend, offering honoraria to community-based groups, and paying a set amount per meeting attended. It is important to be clear about expectations for compensated team members: Is this person an advisor, expected to bring others to meetings or expected to join as a participant themselves?

The city of Richmond, while updating its citywide masterplan, identified as a goal reaching groups traditionally underrepresented in the planning process. The city established six positions that include a stipend for individuals who have experience and connections within identified communities. "The value add for the planning department was that the engagement team used their own social networks, such as emailing friends and colleagues and tapping into community and special interest groups that they were already a part of."<sup>66</sup>

#### **i** LEARN MORE:

- » ["Paying Community Members for Their Time" Shelterforce](#)
- » ["Tools and Resources for Project-Based Community Advisory Boards" Urban Institute](#)

**Expected impact:**

Using a range of methods and tools will increase the opportunity for those interested to participate in a meaningful and comfortable manner. This creates trust between the project team and community, reduces missteps by the project team, and should contribute to a result that is an asset to community members.

Engaging schools and students will offer a new perspective to the conversation and provide a sense of community ownership to the next generation of property owners, designers, developers, business owners, and elected officials. Students observe the world around them closely and, when asked, offer insightful observations and suggestions that can be overlooked by adults.

Increased trust, broad participation, and meaningful ways to contribute to a project are important for architects as well as community members. The information gathered provides rich material for design solutions that will better meet community needs. Additionally, listening to and engaging with community goes a long way to minimize unexpected responses. Hearing challenges to a project or an idea early in a process allows time to understand the issues more deeply and modify plans as appropriate.

**Consider:**

1. Identify what methods are appropriate to answer questions and authentically engage with community members. This might be guided by the advisory group, which understands the local context. Consider different stakeholder groups and the best ways to reach them.
2. Understand what languages will be needed for translating engagement and communication materials and ensure there is enough budget for translation and interpretation assistance.
3. Think about communication methods. Is there a local paper, newsletter, social media group, or similar mechanism that can get the word out about the engagement?

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION



	<b>INFORM</b>	<b>CONSULT</b>	<b>INVOLVE</b>	<b>COLLABORATE</b>	<b>EMPOWER</b>
<b>PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL</b>	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
<b>PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC</b>	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

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IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in many public participation plans. Image credit: International Association for Public Participation [www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)

4. Map the options for engagement activities throughout the project. Ensure there is sufficient funding available to compensate participants and build meaningful engagement platforms.
5. Be clear about the goal of each engagement and how the information collected will influence the final project. Be transparent with project data that impacts the community.

### Understanding place: Community asset mapping

To gain a better understanding of place, consider the social, cultural, ecological, physical, and historical elements and connections that make up a community. Community asset mapping can be a powerful tool. Engage with community stakeholders to build out a picture of the places of value, past and present. This activity will not only open the project team's eyes to an "insider's view" of a place, but it can also shift neighbors' preconceived notions of their own places.

It is important to understand how these different mapping activities intersect to provide a holistic picture of the area, the people who live, work, shop, worship, or visit and the built environment that shapes these communities. This community data should be leveraged by the client and project team to inform decision-making about project design features and positioning, to identify who should be included on a community advisory board, and to select methods of outreach and engagement.

Social capacity, or one's ability to work together to organize public relationships rather than give responsibility for those relationships wholly to government actors or the flux of market exchange, can be used to apply knowledge gleaned through community asset mapping to connect the dots between established community members or organizations and the project team, consultants, and outside advisors. Applying social capacity can help collectively form a vision for how a project might support existing community initiatives.

#### Expected impact:

Better understanding of existing community networks and capacities will ensure the project can better contribute to these systems by helping to map and meet their existing goals and initiatives where applicable.



Community members and designers discussing design options. Credit: Side A Photography

*R. Steven Lewis of ZGF focuses on the elements of Black joy “that have carried this people through struggle and oppression for all of this time and still exist as an engine to keep us moving. That’s contagious. It offers a great deal of possibility and hope for people on both sides.”*

Participatory mapping with community groups can help them articulate assets and understand gaps in resources, informing the project team’s approach to their specific project and the organizations or individuals who might help them better meet community needs.

Increased awareness of the historic and contemporary conditions of inequity in a particular context can support better equitable outcomes by enabling project teams to influence decision-making in order to avoid repeating past transgressions.

**Consider:**

1. Physical mapping can include printing large-format maps of the neighborhood and working with community members in a group charette to identify specific challenges and opportunities that may impact the project.
2. Historical mapping works well as a large-format timeline that can be populated by community members familiar with events that shaped the neighborhood.
3. Social mapping, or stakeholder mapping, uses diagrams to list groups or individuals in the community and can highlight connections and influence at a neighborhood level, enabling the project team to partner more successfully with key groups that could influence project success in the eyes of the community.
4. The project team should reflect on how mapping might challenge assumptions about the neighborhood, how the project might respond to newfound context, and how they might build in space to support community initiatives and build community power. An example might be building a public plaza to host placemaking activities.

### Involving community: Stakeholder advisory groups

A community advisory group is comprised of individuals who are representative of the community. They can be identified, recruited, and engaged through various methods, but generally they might already be part of a group, such as a residents’ association, local business group, school parent or tenant association, faith community, or local nonprofit enterprise serving the area. Having such a group at the table through the process can support broader community participation and ensure that the community goals and values are met at different stages in the process. This group not only has a critical understanding of the project’s setting, but also is deeply invested in the community. They can provide connection to a community’s unique culture of place and offer ideas to the design team, as well as convey information to and collect thoughts from a more diverse community. Investment in this organization might be needed upfront to build capacity.

Community members and other stakeholders are part of project decision-making. Their thoughts and opinions should influence project outcomes, ensuring the project is successfully responsive to community wants and needs (place-based and people-focused). This benefits the client by reducing the risk of schedule overruns from lengthy community opposition and inclines local government toward speedy approvals for the client’s similar future projects by demonstrating the client’s success with community relationships. Engaging in stakeholder advisory groups, especially if there is upfront investment made in trainings or skill building, can increase a community’s power to impact its future.

### IN PRACTICE

One example of a successful community advisory group is the [Central Kenilworth Avenue Revitalization Community Development Corporation \(CKAR CDC\)](#), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization established to support projects in Riverdale Park, Maryland. The CDC was formed as a result of community conversations related to the renovation of a commercial corridor and, later, a comprehensive landscape plan resulting from community input.

The CDC has grown in capacity and influence since 2010. When a major infrastructure project planned for the area was changed due to budget cuts, the group mobilized and successfully advocated for adjustments to proposed value engineering methods. Since, the nonprofit has supported projects including:

- » Cafe and training kitchen
- » Job training center
- » Free trees distribution
- » Rain garden
- » Sponsorship of local restaurants to provide approx. 2,000 meals/month
- » Partnership with University of Maryland’s Architecture Department to create mobile resource hub pop-ups

**Consider:**

- 1.** What groups or individuals need to be represented on an advisory group for the community? This could be residents' associations, local support groups, nonprofit organization, residents, young people, school leadership, and faith groups. Established leaders and those working in communities often know others to involve. Don't hesitate to ask for recommendations.
- 2.** Clearly define roles and responsibilities. Seek to understand barriers to participating in the process. Local leaders or neighbors willing to get involved often have a lot of commitments already. Consider meeting timing, platform, and childcare, and, where possible, provide food, stipends, or other forms of compensation. Record video meetings and post them online so citizens with time constraints can view them at will.
- 3.** Respect different abilities and knowledge. Build trust and work with local groups with engagement experience that could facilitate the process.
- 4.** Avoid jargon unless it is necessary to the project. If so, clearly explain technical terms or provide term definitions, seeking to build consensus and understanding.

*Right Credit:  
Determined by  
Design Project:  
Capitol Vista,  
Affordable  
Housing located in  
Washington, DC*

