

Better Together

An Analysis of Public Participation in
Flower Mound, Texas

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Executive Summary

Public participation has become a buzzword among planners and local officials in the past few decades as citizens demand more transparency and involvement in local matters. This has resulted in countless reports detailing “best practices” for improving public engagement. And while these studies are important, what communities are finding is that more activity doesn’t always mean more engaged citizens. This study analyzes the existing condition in Flower Mound based on the CLEAR toolkit developed by the European Committee for Local and Regional Democracy, supplemented by the Town of Flower Mound Resident Survey. The audit evaluates the 5 elements- Can do, Like to, Enabled to, Asked to, and Responded to- that support vibrant public engagement.

The results of the study illustrated in Table 1 show that Flower Mound has a strong foundation in all five areas, the strongest of which is the “Can Do” element that evaluates the availability of resources and knowledge to participate. The weakest element, “Responded to”, suggests that the town can improve the perception residents have towards the way in which their opinions are responded to.

CLEAR Tool Profile

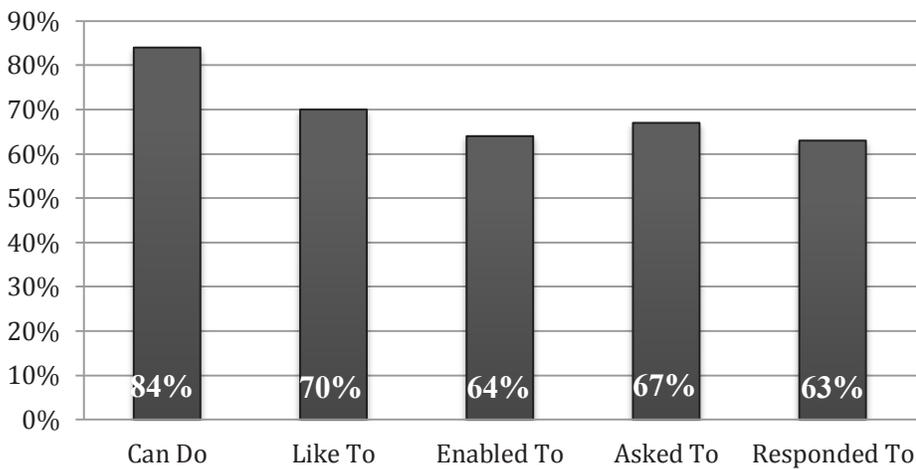


Table 1: CLEAR Tool Profile for Flower Mound, Texas

Based on the analysis, the following recommendations were developed for each of the elements according to the strengths and weaknesses of each:

Can do

1. Ensure just distribution of municipal resources and community activities throughout the town.
 - a. Work with developers to fund community centers in the Western side of Flower Mound.
 - b. Consider implementing a Citizen Leadership Academy geared towards involving and educating citizens that aren’t usually involved in local government affairs.
2. Promote continued learning for municipal officials charged with overseeing public engagement.
 - a. Partner with nearby universities such as the University of North Texas Public Administration program and University of Texas-Dallas Public Affairs program to develop a seminar program geared for municipal employees. Incentivize these and other continued education programs.

Like to

1. Ensure potentially “marginalized” groups are given sufficient avenues to participate.
 - a. Allow residents to have a choice in how they participate. Public participation efforts should include traditional forms of engagement, such as public hearings, as well as online tools tailored to the issues at hand. All participatory avenues should be advertised.

2. Create participation opportunities that engage community members within their own domain.
 - a. Consider non-traditional avenues, such as meetings-in-a-box and online forums.

Enabled to

1. Strengthen existing civic infrastructure.
 - a. Create “Neighborhood Liaisons” for all neighborhoods in Flower Mound.
 - b. Increase the amount of support offered to local community groups through the Community Support Organization Funding Program and ensure that a variety of organizations utilize the program.

Asked to

1. Use technology to engage busy residents where they already are.
 - a. Increase the use of the town’s existing social media outlets and create a “social media strategy”.
 - b. Consider online / mobile applications to collect ideas and opinions of residents on a temporary and ongoing basis.

Responded to

1. Make evaluations of public engagement processes a key component of planning activities.
 - a. Use a dedicated evaluation system, such as the to analyze significant planning activities and publish findings in a timely manner.

Part I- Introduction

Understanding the context of public participation

Although not a new concept, public participation in local decision making is becoming increasingly important to planners. As more emphasis is placed on transparency and public input in all aspects of government, it is clear that understanding when and how to engage the public is crucial to getting the job done. And in a country founded on the principles of democracy, the push for public engagement seems almost patriotic; to not engage the public in decisions seems to be a violation of citizen rights.

It should also be noted though that values and debate regarding public participation have waxed and waned in past decades, having a significant start during the 1950's with the Urban Renewal Act when legislation requiring participation was initiated. The War on Poverty further developed the idea of participation and how it should incorporate citizens¹. Some eras, particularly the 1980's were deemed "the decade of participation" while periods during the recession of the 1990's, participation was placed on the backburner when emphasis on economic development dominated the planning environment². The role of planning theory has also no doubt contributed to the flux of debate on public participation as planners reevaluate their position in society.

But yet, researcher and author Robert Putnam has illustrated in his book, "Bowling Alone" that civic engagement, including engagement in local government issues has been declining in the past decade. He explains that the public is doing fewer things collectively and more individually. For planners and local government officials, this can be worrisome as public meetings and community events are seeing fewer participants³. Public engagement experts suggest that the days are over when citizens come out for town meetings out of pure civic duty.

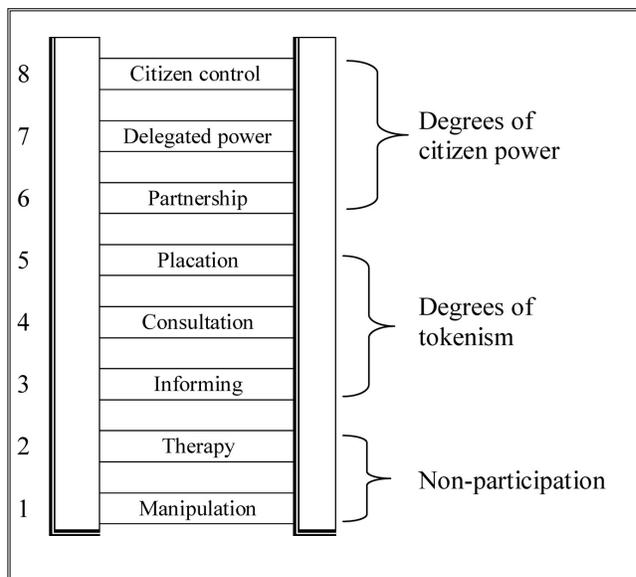
This phenomenon might cause anxiety among planners and public officials who wish to see that the only way to encourage more, or at least a stable amount, of participation is to work harder to find and entice individuals to come to traditional public meetings. But this may not be the best solution. It may be more effective-for both the planners and the community- if a thorough evaluation exists identifying the strengths and weaknesses of these existing participatory practices, to create a game plan based on these conclusions. It is crucial to understand recent trends in engagement and base public participation strategies on these trends rather than on engagement of the past. A new approach and a new attitude towards public engagement might be what are needed instead.

1 Day, D. (1997). Citizen Participation in the Planning Process: An Essentially Contested Concept? *Journal of Planning Literature*, 421-432.

2 Ibid.

3 Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling Alone*. New York City: Touchstone.

Figure 1: Arnstien's Ladder of Participation



Source: Arnstien (1969)

Defining public participation

But before an evaluation can take place, the terms “public engagement” and “public participation” must be defined. The pivotal author on citizen participation, Sherry Arnstein defined public participation as “citizen power”⁴. Her critical piece “A Ladder of Citizen Participation” explains the difference between ritualistic public involvement and true engagement of citizens, of all backgrounds. By breaking down the variety of participatory activities (Figure 1), Arnstein was able to give planners a clear understanding of what end their participation process achieved. Since Arnstein’s analysis, organizations and research foundations across the globe have developed their own definition and

classifications of public participation. have decided that the term Public participation doesn’t delve deep enough into the fundamental and democratic elements that should be evident in participatory practices.

These definitions and “ladders of involvement” beg the question “how involved should the citizenry be in the decision making process?” With so many different approaches, how is a planner to decide what efforts need to be made on their part. For this report, I will define “public participation” as the whole spectrum of the

processes that involve the public in decision making while “public engagement” is the deliberate act of inviting dialog. Both aspects will be discussed as the variety of planning activities require diversity in the participatory processes used; there can’t be a one-size-fits-all “public participation plan”.

I suspect that the trouble over public participation stems from the dilemma of “how much is enough?” In his 1989 book, Beneviste maintains that planning “cannot succeed without some participation, it cannot afford to be dominated by participatory processes.” He goes so far as to declare public

Public Participation

“to involve those who are affected by a decision in the decision-making process. It promotes sustainable decisions by providing participants with the information they need to be involved in a meaningful way, and it communicates to participants how their input affects the decision.” - International Association for Public Participation

“the involvement of individuals and groups that are positively or negatively affected by, or that are interested in, a proposed project, program, plan or policy that is subject to a decision-making process.” - International Association for Impact Assessment

⁴ Arnstein, S. (1969). A Ladder of Citizen Participation. Journal of the American Institute of Planners, 216-224.

participation as the “Achilles heel of planning.”⁵ Thus an important aspect of identifying the ideal location on the public participation spectrum is identifying the costs and benefits of participation.

Costs and benefits⁶

Benefits

1. Improved governance
 - Provides legitimacy to government entities and their plans
 - Promotes greater accountability of government officials, programs, and plans
 - Increases opportunities for active citizenship
 - Promotes effective information dissemination
2. Greater social cohesion
 - Brings diverse or hard to reach individuals together
 - Builds relationships between communities
 - Increases equality of access to policy
3. Improved quality of service, projects, and programs
 - Ensures that public investment is based on the desires and needs of the community
 - Reduces maintenance and management costs as a result of an engendered sense of ownership
 - Enables faster or easier decision making in the future with relation to the policy
 - Encourages people to share the responsibility for improving their quality of life
4. Greater capacity building and learning
 - Encourages for widespread education and understanding of public institutions
 - Allows citizens the opportunity to better access the services they need
 - Builds confidence and optimism among citizens which supports the voluntary and community sectors

Costs

1. Monetary
 - Expenditures of staff time, resources, consultant expenses, training for staff and participants relating to technical processes
 - Event costs, newsletters, and leaflets
 - monitoring and evaluation fees
2. Non-monetary
 - Commitments of time contributed by participants, time for learning new skills and information for informed participation
3. Risks
 - Allows the risk to the municipality reputation when misunderstanding or inadequate participation occurs
 - Brings about potential stress, uncertainty, and conflict

While it would seem less complicated for planners to limit the role of the participatory process, it would be unwise for many reasons. Planners, elected officials, and citizens alike realize that there are benefits to incorporating participatory avenues into the decision making process. The Involve Foundation, in their comprehensive report entitled *The True Costs of Public Participation*, analyzed the costs and benefits of public participation based on research and case studies of fifteen

5 Beneviste, G. (1989). *Mastering the Politics of Planning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

British municipal government participation processes⁶. While the participatory requirements are slightly different than those in most US municipality, American research illustrates the same basic costs and benefits to local governments here. In particular the authors of the report identify four overarching benefits and three primary costs.

It is apparent from these indicators that many of the costs and benefits are hard to define in monetary terms. Additionally, the values that come from the elements can be quantified differently by individuals with alternative perspectives. For example, citizens and planners who value the democratic aspects of the process may place a higher value on the social capital aspects. This fact has led some to criticize the emphasis on finding an economic value for participatory processes as this number can be contested.

The report suggested that, generally speaking, most municipalities were more apt to record costs rather than benefits. This occurs because financial recordings and previous budgets can provide concrete values of expenditures⁷. This means that evaluating public participation process regularly is important as a means of collecting the community's perceived benefits to justify the costs. Unfortunately while the exact costs borne by the municipality can be collected to some extent, the costs to the public as a whole are much more challenging to collect and compare. That said, the improvement of public participation depends on a deep and thorough understanding of the costs and benefits for all participants.

Context

This analysis will look at the Town of Flower Mound, Texas, a suburb located in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex with approximately 67,825 residents. Flower Mound is a predominately wealthy and well-educated community with a median household income of \$118,725 and 57.6% of the population holding a bachelor's degree or higher. The town has a small proportion of minorities, the largest of which is the Asian community (8.6%), followed by Hispanics (8.4%) and African Americans (3.2%).⁸ The primarily residential community saw a period of rapid growth during the 1990s which prompted the town to adopt the SMARTGrowth policy aimed at managing the development rate.⁹ While the town is still considered a bedroom community, recent light industrial development has brought more balance to the type of land uses within the town. Additionally, until the past decade most of the development in Flower Mound has been concentrated along the eastern side of town. However, development along the western side of town has increased substantially in recent years leading to a renewed urgency for planning and engagement of this region and its residents.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze the public participation practices with data collected from the municipal and resident population. While the town has conducted overarching analysis of residents' perceptions of elements such as service delivery and quality of life, analysis of public participation practices comprised only a brief portion of the two surveys conducted in 2009 and 2011. Thus this study looks holistically at the factors that impact public participation and true engagement. The goal is then to identify the elements in which Flower Mound is successful and those that can be improved. The following section will introduce the methods and findings of the

6 Involve UK. (2005). *The True Costs of Public Participation*. Involve UK.

7 Ibid.

8 "Flower Mound (town) QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau." Flower Mound (town) QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau. US Census Bureau. <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/4826232.html>

9 "SMARTGrowth." Flower Mound, Texas. <http://www.flower-mound.com/index.aspx?NID=945>

C.L.E.A.R toolkit used as the primary analysis. The third section will introduce recommendations based on the toolkit findings and provide case studies to illustrate implementation practices. Finally, a public participation evaluation tool will be introduced in section four for future use in the town.

Part II- Methodology and Analysis

CLEAR Tool

The analysis of this study uses a tool published in 2005 by the European Committee for Local and Regional Democracy. Known as the CLEAR tool, the audit consists of five elements that influence public participation at the local government level¹. The diagnostic tool uses a set of questions that can evaluate the strength of each of the five elements. The tool was developed over a period of 2 years

Can do- have the resources and knowledge to participate;
Like to- have a sense of attachment that reinforces participation;
Enabled to- are provided with the opportunity for participation;
Asked to- are mobilized by official bodies or voluntary groups;
Responded to- see evidence that their views have been considered.

by a body of local officials and academic researchers. This has led to a comprehensive tool that can be used globally. In fact, the tool has been used in over 36 cities in Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain. It should be noted that

the tool is relevant to cities in the United States due to the fundamental nature of the elements being evaluated. The questions were designed to be tailored to different political and socioeconomic environments.

While these elements are ideally found holistically in a municipality's public engagement strategy, each community will have different strengths and weaknesses. The authors of the tool explain that the idea isn't to have an equal balance of all elements, but to maximize the strengths while catering to the unique makeup of the community. However, the point of the study is to identify weaknesses in Flower Mound practices and provide recommendations to improve within these areas.

Methodology

Each of the five sections consists 10-20 of questions pertaining to each element (see Appendix I). The sets of questions were divided into one of three categories: demographic and quantitative, qualitative and policy-related, or qualitative and opinion-oriented. Data for the first category was collected via the US Census Bureau. The second and third groups of questions were divided and compiled into two surveys. The first survey consisted of the qualitative and policy-related

1 European Committee on Local and Regional Democracy. (2008). CLEAR Tool. Strausburg: Council of Europe.

questions and was sent to municipal employees, members of the Town Council and the Mayor. The second survey consisted of the remaining questions that related to qualitative and opinion-oriented information and was distributed to residents and community leaders. Some of the questions regarding the “Asked to” and “Responded to” section were sent to both groups in order to identify gaps in perspective. Both surveys used wording identical or as close to the original wording of the audit as possible. General residency questions were included in the surveys which were distributed via email using Google forms. The survey distributed to the community was sent to local organization leaders who were encouraged to distribute to their members. Ninety-one surveys were emailed and 32 responses were collected, resulting in a 35% response rate.

Finally, data collected from the resident’s survey was compared to trends that were noted in the 2009 and 2011 Town of Flower Mound Resident Survey prepared by the National Research Center on behalf of the town. The answers from the town initiated survey were compared to this audit survey response in order to verify the accuracy and significance. While the town’s resident survey touched on a few aspects of public participation, it did not have enough information to be used for the CLEAR analysis.

Creating the CLEAR Profile

Once the information from the above sources was compiled, a CLEAR profile was developed according to the instructions outlined in the published CLEAR Tool report. For answers in each of the five sections that were not ranked by residents or municipal officials, a benchmark of research-backed engagement best practices was used to evaluate Flower Mound’s practices. Each answer was then given a numerical ranking from one to five when compared to the benchmark. Answers that illustrated ways the community was meeting or exceeding the standard were given scores of four or five while answers that demonstrated that the community was not able to meet the benchmark were given scores of one or two. For many of the qualitative answers, particularly in the “Like to” or “Asked to” sections, the numbers were determined by the average numerical ranking identified by the survey takers. Standard deviations were also calculated for each of these questions and influenced the weight of the answer. Written responses were also codified.

The final stage of the profile development involved verifying the data from the CLEAR surveys with the answers provided to the 2009 and 2011 Flower Mound Resident Survey conducted by the town. Whenever possible, the town’s survey was used in conjunction with the CLEAR survey responses to determine the most appropriate scale along the benchmark. Once a score was assigned to each question, the total was calculated for each section and given a percentage.

Limitations

While the CLEAR Tool does provide a framework for identifying strengths and weaknesses, it should be noted that the analysis required some subjectivity. The quantitative survey responses do provide more objective analysis, but it is important that the town continuously monitor resident responses and assess the results within the framework of previous public participation evaluations. For example, the question measuring the trustworthiness of the national government could arguably be linked only remotely to notion of local government public participation.

Additionally, the electronic CLEAR surveys were distributed to either municipal / elected officials or community leaders of town organizations. It should be noted that the survey distributed to Flower Mound residents was distributed through civic organizations such as Home Owners Associations, Parent Teacher Associations, local volunteer organizations, and other major community groups.

It could be that these individuals have a stronger attachment to the community and desire to participate in local affairs as a result of their interest in their community organization.

Results and analysis

CLEAR Tool Profile

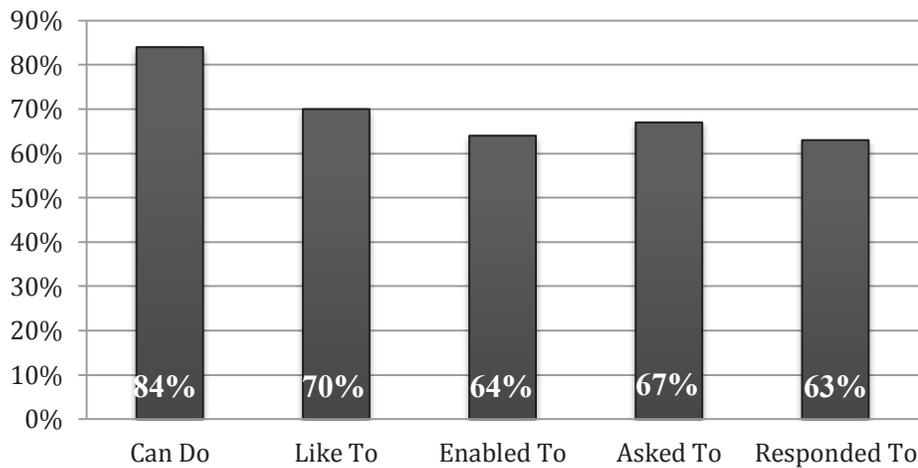


Table 1: CLEAR Tool Profile for Flower Mound, Texas

The profile suggests that the town is doing a good job at engaging citizens. Each element scored at least 60 percent which demonstrates that the town is meeting and, to some extent, exceeding expectations of residents and municipal officials. This aligns with the results of the 2009 and 2011 Flower Mound Residents Survey which demonstrated an overall satisfaction with local government's decisions.

Can Do

The first section analyzes the socio-economic variables that often impact the participation rate. Many of the questions within this section analyzed the demographic characteristics of the community, especially educational and employment levels. A study conducted by the Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy in 2004 explains that individuals who have more education and wealth are more likely to have the resources, such as computers and writing and speaking skills, in addition to civic initiative.

Flower Mound's relatively high income, educational attainment rates, and uniform ethnicity means that most people have access to the physical resources they need to participate, especially the use of computers and internet. As characteristics that distinguish Flower Mound, it is clear that this element of the profile proved to be the strongest. However, physical resources and civic literacy, while major factors of the "Can Do" element, are just a part of a community's ability and willingness to participate. Responses indicate that the biggest barrier to participation is the lack of time due to the number of dual-income families with kids. This means that if the town wants to improve within this element, strategies will have to focus on issues to timing as the limiting factor. Attention should be paid to avoiding "consultation fatigue" as a result of too many or excessively long meetings.

Finally, it should be noted that the town's homogenous demographic- in terms of race, education, political orientation, and wealth- might produce less resistance than might be found within communities of diversity. While this might produce a false sense of ease in the decision making process, this situation often produces even more of a challenge to seek out the minority opinion when appropriate.

Like To

Based on the results of the Flower Mound Residents Surveys conducted in 2009 and 2011, it is apparent that the strong sense of community pride translates this into the second highest element of the CLEAR profile. This section focused primarily on the “felt sense of community” through gauging identity, homogeneity, trust, and citizenship. The strongest positive responses came from questions that gauge residents’ attachment to the area and the sense of community spirit. The lowest scores pertained to questions acknowledging social bonds between neighbors and ties to “felt identity” and trust of the municipality. These responses, along with the mainstream perception to residents trustworthiness and homogeneity suggests that residents are strongly committed to the community’s “spirit” or reputation but may not feel like they need to be active in neighborhood or municipal affairs.

Written responses that address citizen exclusion and legitimacy suggest that the biggest barriers to overcome is the equitable engagement of seniors, residents living in the western portions of Flower Mound, and ethnic minorities. On the other hand, residents suggested that the municipality is more likely to value opinions of long-term residents and developers. This notion suggests that special attention should be paid to engaging the wider public and not just the “usual suspects” if the town wants to overcome issues of community trust. While the data doesn’t show hostility towards local government, the best way to develop trust is to show active engagement towards these “marginalized” groups.

Enabled To

This portion of the analysis looks at the existing civic organizations and their involvement in local government issues. Research shows that “political participation in isolation is more difficult and less sustainable (unless an individual is highly motivated) than the mutual reinforcing engagement of contact through groups and networks.”² This suggests that if you want more than the “usual suspects” or angry citizens to be involved in the decision making process you need to develop sound relationships with community organizations and networks so that participation is based on civic duty as much as self-interest. Thus there is growing consensus that the foundation of vibrant community engagement is strong civic infrastructure.

Evidence suggests that Flower Mound has a variety of civic organizations, the most common of which are related to sports/hobbies, religious/church-based, resident/neighborhood, and parent/teacher organizations, respectively. However, respondents note that political, environmental, and neighborhood associations have the biggest influence on municipal decision making. And while community members claim that the community sector is in an active state, this evidence suggests that these organizations are either not being actively involved in the planning or political realm or don’t believe that they need to or will be heard. This hypothesis is further backed up by the written responses which claim that the major weakness of the community sector is the “squeaky wheel syndrome” and the “few doing most of the work.” The fact that involved individuals were primarily responsible for answering questions within this portion of the analysis might produce some bias in the fairly positive results. While the town is not in a bad state, results from the 2009 and 2011 Flower Mound Resident Survey support this fact. In fact, the town was ranked “much below” the national and benchmark cities with regards to “opportunities to participate in social events and activities” and “opportunities to volunteer”.

2 European Committee on Local and Regional Democracy. (2008). CLEAR Tool. Strausburg: Council of Europe.

However, the town is doing a number of good things that, if built upon, could significantly improve the environment of civic engagement and trust. First, the community support funding program is one positive step towards building relationships with community organizations. Additionally, staff members have historically engaged stakeholders, especially Home Owners Associations, through the existing organizations during major planning process. These are positive steps and should be continued, however strengthening the civic infrastructure, and thus connections to residents, should be built upon if more diverse stakeholders are to be truly engaged.

Asked To

The fourth section looks at the strategies that the municipality uses to engage the community. It is clear that the town utilizes a number of different forms of participation, including public meetings, open comments, focus groups, and surveys/opinion polls. Of the 13 most common forms of participation, Flower Mound has utilized almost all of them. The town has also sought to incorporate technology and the internet, to some extent, in the process of engaging the community. In fact, the town has been very successful in meeting with the public virtually, as demonstrated by the 88% of residents who visited the town website in 2011. Based on the findings of the “Can Do” section of the analysis, this approach seems like a worthwhile effort as individuals who live in Flower Mound are more likely to have internet access than lower-income municipalities.

But while these are all good, improvement in this area must be based on increasing the quality of public engagement rather than the quantity. In a 2009 study by the National League of Cities, two-thirds of all city officials acknowledged that they “regularly use special deliberative processes, such as town hall meetings, to involve large numbers of people on critical issues”.³ However there continues to be a desire to improve the deliberation system. Researchers have long noted that more events only lead to citizen fatigue which suggests that improvements must be made in the quality of participatory endeavor.

All this should be said with the understanding of the importance of balance in the engagement process. The variety of ages and personality types will require different engagement strategies to cater to the variety of needs and preferences. Part of this understanding includes acknowledging power dynamics. For example, these dynamics can be influenced by the manner in which the agenda is set, the venue is chosen, and the formality of the meeting. If important decisions are made by way of public hearings within Town Hall where residents are given a few minutes to speak, it follows that citizens feel intimidated. While residents must indeed be asked to participate, it is critical that the format in which they are asked to participate is within a setting in which they would feel comfortable and compelled to discuss. Without an understanding of power dynamics, municipal officials are giving mere lip service to the idea of public engagement.

Responded To

As the previous section suggested, the town uses a variety of practices to engage the public, the most predominant of which is through public hearings. Nonetheless, elements that measure “balance and prioritization” and “feedback and education” show that residents are slightly but consistently less optimistic about the decision making process than municipal officials. Key findings show that the largest difference in ranking, an entire point, when gauging how well decision-makers are able to understand and take into account the views of citizens. Additionally, the worst ranking by both groups occurred when asked how well citizens understand and accept the decisions made by the municipality. Like the rest of the analysis profile, this section does not paint a negative picture

3 Barnes, W. & Mann, B. (2011). Making Local Democracy Work: Municipal Official’s Views About Public Engagement. National Civic Review: 58-62.

for which the town is in need of complete overhaul. But if improvements are to be made, they must include a system for which to demonstrate a more balanced view of citizen and professional/elected official opinion.

A number of things influence the perception citizens have towards municipal responsiveness, one of which being the issue of power dynamics discussed above. Another issue for which the town must be careful of is “privileging expert over ‘local’ knowledge”⁴. While citizens should have access to relevant information pertaining to the decision at hand, local knowledge needs to be acknowledged and given a voice, especially if consultants from outside the community are utilized in the planning process. Being proactive in the public engagement process, while crucial, is only beneficial if the citizens feel as if their voice is actually being heard.

4 Bryson, J., Quick, K., Slotterback, C. S., & Crosby, B. (2012). Designing Public Participation Processes: Theory to Practice. *Public Administration Review*, 23-34.

Part III- Recommendations

“Can do” Recommendations

The following recommendations address the availability of resources and residents’ knowledge to participate.

1. Ensure just distribution of municipal resources and community activities throughout the town.
 - a. Work with developers to fund community centers in the Western side of Flower Mound.
 - b. Consider implementing a Citizen Leadership Academy geared towards involving and educating citizens that aren’t usually involved in local government affairs.
2. Promote continued learning for municipal officials charged with overseeing public engagement.
 - a. Partner with nearby universities such as the University of North Texas Public Administration program and University of Texas-Dallas Public Affairs program to develop a seminar program geared for municipal employees. Incentivize these and other continued education programs.

Notable Examples:

Montgomery Citizen Leadership Academy Montgomery, Ohio

The City of Montgomery conducts a Citizens’ Leadership academy each year for 25 residents interested in learning more about the workings of the municipality and how they interact with community organizations and businesses. The Academy consists of 10 workshops that meet between January and March and seek individuals who may not usually be involved in local government. Once the participants have graduated from the program, they are included in an alumni group, a municipal listserv, and are frequently asked to participate in community forums on local issues. MCLA alumni are frequently enlisted as leaders for community organizations and are generally more civic-minded than before participating in the leadership academy.

Institute for Local Government- University of Michigan Dearborn Southeastern Michigan Local Governments

In 2004 UMD created the Institute for Local Government in conjunction with the School of Education and Master of Public Policy and Public Administration programs in order to provide seminars for elected officials and public servants. The Institute’s seminars are designed to address the major public policy and administration issues faced by the municipalities in Southeast Michigan. Faculty members lead the seminars which emphasis practical strategies and solutions for the local context. Most events are held during the evening hours and include dinner and discussion. Due to the cost of hosting, approximately \$425 per event, the 3 hour seminars cost between \$50-80 per attendee. Scholarships are occasionally available. Additionally, the Institute was expanded to

include a Technical Assistance program that partners MPP and MPA students with local governments to provide research and analytical assistance for no charge. The IFLG has estimated that this program provides municipalities with assistance estimated to cost \$30,000-50,000.

Additional Resources:

City of Montgomery, Ohio. Montgomery Citizens Leadership Academy.
<http://www.montgomeryohio.org/citizens-leadership-academy/>

Institute for Local Government- UMD
<http://www.casl.umd.umich.edu/iflg/>

Thomas, Dale. "The Evolving Role of Universities in Expanding Knowledge Among Local Elected Officials." *Journal of Public Affairs Education* 16.3 2010: 421-50.

"Like to" Recommendations

These recommendations attempt to increase the sense of attachment to the community that reinforces participation.

1. Ensure potentially "marginalized" groups are given sufficient avenues to participate.
 - a. Allow residents to have a choice in how they participate. Public participation efforts should include traditional forms of engagement, such as public hearings, as well as online tools tailored to the issues at hand. All participatory avenues should be advertised.
2. Create participation opportunities that engage community members within their own domain.
 - a. Consider non-traditional avenues, such as meetings-in-a-box and online forums.

Notable Examples:

"Meeting in a Box", Imagine Austin Austin, Texas

As part of a comprehensive public participation strategy, the City of Austin implemented "Meetings-in-a-Box" (MIAB) as a way of engaging residents who were unable to make it to the community forums, or who preferred to meet in a small-scale setting. Each MIAB included a set of instructions, sample invitations, a PowerPoint presentation, and sheets for recording feedback. Community leaders and volunteers were given some training on how to conduct the meetings and were the primary hosts, however staff members led meetings at the Asian American Cultural Center for a group of 75 participants. The only requirements were that hosts ensure each meeting had a minimum number of participants and all feedback was recorded and returned to the City by the specified deadline. The MIAB proved to be very popular among residents and engaged residents who didn't traditionally participate in community visioning events.

"It's amazing how people want to participate, if they can do so on their own terms. All we did was present a little game plan, and hundreds of individuals organized their own small groups to talk about their visions for Austin. The Meeting-In-A-Box went viral." –Patricia Wilson

Open Town Hall Rancho Cordova, California

When the city of Rancho Cordova sought to reevaluate the local regulations on raising chickens within city limits, planners utilized an Open Town Hall online forum to encourage residents from all sides of town to discuss the issue before City Council adopted new regulations. The online

forum engaged residents by providing background information on the subject and allowing each registered participant to provide one comment, similar in format to traditional public hearings. The Open Town Hall website had over 560 visitors and 66 comments that could be viewed geographically on a map of districts within the city. The website also provided a word cloud that illustrated the priorities of residents which assisted staff during the drafting of the new regulations.

Overall, Rancho Cordova found the engagement process to be civil and constructive for all involved parties. Staff monitored comments and all but one was in conformance with the city's public meeting civility guidelines. Planners and elected officials observed that the process engaged much more than the usual suspects and about 150 residents signed up to receive updates from the city after the Open Town Hall ended.

Additional Resources:

"Thinking and Meeting Out of the Box" Official Public Meetings That are More Participatory and Effective. National League of Cities.

Vogel, Robert; Molder, Evelina; Huggins, Mike. "The Extent of Public Participation". Public Management. March 2014: 6-10.

Online tools:

"Engagement Commons." Code of America- Engagement Commons. Code of America. <http://commons.codeforamerica.org/engagement-commons>

"Enabled to" Recommendations

The following recommendations ensure residents are given ample opportunities to participate.

1. Strengthen existing civic infrastructure.
 - a. Create "Neighborhood Liaisons" for all neighborhoods in Flower Mound.
 - b. Increase the amount of support offered to local community groups through the Community Support Organization Funding Program and ensure that a variety of organizations utilize the program.

Notable Examples:

Neighborhood Liaisons Bellevue, Washington

The City's Neighborhood Liaison program was created to encourage engagement by assigning a City staff member to a neighborhood in the community. The Liaison is responsible for maintaining connections with neighborhood leaders and ensuring quality customer service.

According to the City website, residents can contact their Neighborhood Liaison whenever they want:

- Information and don't know where to find it.
- A connection to City staff or resources.
- To get more involved with their City and neighborhood.
- Advice on influencing City decisions.
- Help resolving a neighborhood issue or concern.
- To form a neighborhood association or re-energize an existing one.

Additional Resources:

City of Bellevue, Washington. Neighborhood Liaisons. http://www.ci.bellevue.wa.us/neighborhood_liaisons.htm

“The New Laboratories of Democracy: How Local Government Is Reinventing Civic Engagement. Part One: Structure and Form.” National Civic Review 98.2. 2009: 3-8.

“Citizen Engagement in Montgomery Celebrating Successes and Shaping the Future” City of Montgomery, Ohio. International City/County Management Association. 2010.

“Asked to” Recommendations

These recommendations ensure that residents are mobilized by official bodies or voluntary groups.

1. Use technology to engage busy residents where they already are.
 - a. Increase the use of the town’s existing social media outlets and create a “social media strategy”.
 - b. Consider online / mobile applications to collect ideas and opinions of residents on a temporary and ongoing basis.

Notable Examples:

Manor Labs

Manor, Texas

Crowdsourcing has become a successful means of engaging the community in Manor, Texas after the town launched “Manor Labs”, a website that allows residents to submit and rate ideas for staff consideration. Residents are given “Innobucks points” for each idea submitted, commented on, or implemented. These points can then be redeemed for prizes that range from a gift card to a local restaurant to “Mayor for the Day”. Ideas are considered by a committee after they receive a set number of comments. The evaluated proposals are then reviewed by city officials who decide whether to implement the idea. One year after “Manor Labs” was launched, the city has engaged over 1/3 of the residents and has received over 100 ideas; 5 of which have been implemented. Part of the success of the program can be attributed to the inexpensive and readily available software.

Marin County Social Media Playbook

Marin County, California

In order to use social media outlets more effectively, Marin County developed a Social Media Playbook designed to synchronize social media efforts from all departments and provide goals and objectives for each platform used by the county. The playbook was developed by a workgroup of city staff and attorneys as well as department advisors. The final guide was also reviewed by the county’s Social Media Taskforce.

The guide provides a workplan with a designated process that each department must adhere if they wish to utilize county social media. The playbook addresses best practices for utilizing online tools and communicating with residents effectively. The document lists the social media networks approved for use by county departments and lists usage standards and resources for effective use for each social media outlet. The Playbook and accompanying protocols and training have resulted in a streamlined and effective approach to social media.

Additional Resources:

Government: Social Networking Comes of Age.” Institute for Policy and Civic Engagement. 2012.

<http://www.uic.edu/cuppa/ipce/interior/CELocalEGovSMFullReport2012.pdf>

“Public Engagement & Technology.” Institute for Local Government. <http://www.ca-ilg.org/public-engagement-technology>

Rucker, Della, and Patrick Whalen. Online Public Participation Platforms and Applications. Wise Economy, 2012.

“San Mateo County Social Media Toolkit.” San Mateo County, Feb. 2011.

“Responded to” Recommendations

The following recommendations ensure residents see evidence that their views have been considered.

1. Make evaluations of public engagement processes a key component of planning activities.
 - a. Use a dedicated evaluation system, such as the to analyze significant planning activities and publish findings in a timely manner.

Notable Examples:

Pinellas County Metropolitan Planning Organization Pinellas County, Florida

In order to evaluate their information distribution and engagement activities, the Pinellas County Metropolitan Planning Organization has developed a list of information distribution and engagement indicators that are examined on a regular basis. The MPO has developed a tracking system that logs data collected at public engagement events. Staff members use the system to log data relating to each event including the titles, topics, dates, location, and attendee information. The MPO is also developing a system for logging comments and tracking how each comment is being handled. Finally, the MPO tracks its website use by utilizing counting mechanisms that identify the most accessed documents and pages.

“Assessing Public Engagement Effectiveness: Rapid Review Worksheets”

Various Cities and Counties

One of the best evaluation tools available for free was developed by the Institute for Local Government. Their “Rapid Review Worksheets” provide a quick way for collecting and systematically analyzing responses. Each evaluation- for participants and local officials- gauges four elements: preparation, participants, process, and results. Each participant is invited to take the survey designed for the public while local officials and those conducting the planning processes take a similar survey. Both are to be completed immediately after the engagement period and should be done independently (i.e. the planners and local officials should not base their responses on those provided by the public). Both surveys can then be tallied using the Excel “Comparison Worksheet”. Results from these surveys should inform any improvements that need to be made and can be collected on the “Process Improvement Worksheet” for future reference.

Additional Resources:

“Assessing Public Engagement Effectiveness: Rapid Review Worksheets.” Institute for Local Government. 2011. <http://www.ca-ilg.org/post/assessing-public-engagement-effectiveness-rapid-review-worksheets>

“Evaluating Public Participation.” Canadian Community for Dialog and Deliberation. <http://www.c2d2.ca/evaluating-public-participation>.

“Best of the Best Resources.” National Coalition for Deliberative Democracy.
<http://ncdd.org/rc/best-of-the-best-resources>

Conclusions

Like many other municipalities in the United States, Flower Mound has put forth significant effort to include public participation in their planning processes. The town has consistently put forth more than the minimum legal requirements. And while many of these efforts are useful, the town must adapt to the new civic environment if it wants to continue to engage residents. Local officials and planners need to realize that “more” isn’t always better when it comes to public engagement. A strong community network of local volunteer organizations, religious institutions, schools, and businesses will provide staff with avenues to connect with residents. Variety, especially when coupled with technology, will help Flower Mound engage with residents “where they are”. These strategies, along with a solid evaluation system, will give busy residents the opportunity, and hopefully the desire, to engage with the town on local issues.

The recommendations outlined in this report are ideas that should help staff members implement a new public participation strategy. However, they are not the only solutions to dealing with low participation. New technology and “best practices” are developed over time and it is the responsibility of the municipality- staff and local officials- to continually seek new ways of engaging the community.

Appendix I

2. Questionnaire

This chapter sets out the key instrument in the CLEAR-tool: the basic questionnaire which proposes the questions to be asked when using the tool.

0. The context of citizen participation in the municipality

Before going into the analysis of the five key factors, it is necessary to have a look at the context in which citizen participation is taking place in the municipality. This first section is, in effect, a stage 0 in the diagnostic process. It provides the opportunity to gather contextual information on the nature of participation in the area and some indication of the initiatives that the municipality is already taking to encourage more active citizen engagement. It asks a variety of overview questions ranging from the size and the general characteristics of the municipality and the most important issues to turnout rates, groups and forms of participation.

- 0.1 What is the population of the municipality?
67,825
- 0.2 What are the main service responsibilities of the municipality?
See page 19- Flower Mound 2011 Resident Survey
- 0.3 What are the key features of the locality (e.g. rural/urban, economic activities, regional position, etc.)?
DFW suburb, bedroom community, “rural environment”
- 0.4 What is the turnout at local elections (average over last 4?) compared with the national average (give actual numbers as well)?
Flower Mound Avg: 11.94%, National Avg: 25.8%

Very high	Higher than average	Average	Less than average	Very low
1	2	3	4	5

- 0.5 Which form of participation are citizens most likely to use in seeking to influence municipal decision makers? (Rank order?)

- Sign a petition **1**
- Protest (demonstration etc)
- Contact the media
- Contact a municipal employee (functionary) **2**
- Contact a local politician **3**
- Respond to a municipal consultation **4**
- Other

- 0.6 Which forms of political engagement are decision-makers most likely to respond to?

- Petition **1**
- Protest (demonstration, boycott etc)
- Media pressure
- Contact with a municipal employee (functionary) **2**
- Contact with a local politician **3**
- Results from a municipal consultation **4**
- Other

- 0.7 Which groups does the municipality consider to be most disengaged or excluded from the political process? (e.g. young people, elderly people, single parents, people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups)

Young people, single parents

0.8 Which groups does the municipality focus its participation initiatives on? (e.g. population as a whole, users of particular services, young people, elderly people, single parents, people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups)

1. population as a whole 2. users of a particular service

0.9 How active do you consider political participation in your area to be compared with the national picture?

Very high	Higher than average	Average	Less than average	Very low
1	2	3	4	5

0.10 What are the main issues that trigger participation in the locality?

1. Zonng and development (NIMBYism)

2. Schools

3. Parks

4. Environmental issues

1. Can do

This section is concerned with the socio-economic arguments that have traditionally dominated explanations for variations in local participation rates. It is the argument that when people have the appropriate skills and resources they are more able to participate. These skills range from the ability and confidence to speak in public or write letters, to the capacity to organise events and encourage others of similar mind to support initiatives. It also includes access to resources that facilitate such activities (resources ranging from photocopying facilities through to internet access and so on). These skills and resources are much more commonly found among the better educated and employed sections of the population: those of higher socio-economic status. The questions are designed to help municipalities explore the strengths and limitations of citizens from this perspective.

Educational attainment

- 1.1 What is the educational attainment of school leavers compared with the national average? (e.g. in the UK, this could be measured by the number of students gaining 5 grade A-C GCSEs)

Post Secondary Degree: FM 57.6%, State 26.3%

Very high	Higher than average	Average	Less than average	Very low
①	2	3	4	5

Employment/unemployment

- 1.2 What is the unemployment rate compared with the national average?

Flower Mound: 4.7%, National: 7.6%

Very high	Higher than average	Average	Less than average	Very low
1	2	3	④	5

Social class

- 1.3 What is the proportion of the workforce in the following occupations (and how does it compare to the national average)? (e.g. in the UK this would be distinguished by the social groups A B C1 C2 D E)

Flower Mound / State

Unemployed	4.7% / 7.6%
Unskilled work	4% / 11%
Semi-skilled work	37.8% / 55%
Skilled work	53.5% / 26.4%
Total	100% / 100%

Another way of asking this question would be: what is the proportion of professional and skilled workers (ABC1s) to semi- or unskilled workers (C2DEs), compared with the national average?

Demography

- 1.4 What is the age profile of the population in the municipality?
<18: 32.7%, 35-54: 58%, >65: 5.5%
- 1.5 What proportion of the population belongs to an ethnic minority group?
83.9% White, 8.6% Asian, 3.2% Black

1.6 How many significant ethnic minority groups are there in the municipality (i.e. that the municipality recognises and addresses in its communications with citizens)?

None officially recognized

1.7 Are there other demographic factors that may be significant for participation (e.g. family structure, student concentration, commuters)?

High population of commuters, dual income families

Resources

1.8 Do citizens have easy access to appropriate resources for political participation?

Yes, all of the below; high percentage have personal computer and internet

The following might be considered particularly relevant:

Easy access to a meeting venue (community centre, village hall etc)
 Easy access to photocopying or other reproduction of materials
 Easy access to a computer with appropriate software
 Easy access to broadband internet

1.9 Do other resources exist within the community that can act as a channel for political engagement? (e.g. local newspaper, radio station, TV station etc that shows an interest in local political issues)

Town website is frequently used by residents (~ 88% use at least once per year)

1.10 Do people have the time for participation? What are the major factors restricting people's time availability?

Yes, if it's made a priority; family commitments and work are largest restrictions.

Skills/Knowledge

1.11 Do citizens have the necessary skills for participating in political life (e.g. the ability to write letters, speak in public, organise meetings etc)?

Yes, the area attracts highly educated and wealthy individuals.

1.12 Do citizens have the competence to utilise the resources in their community (e.g. to use computers, the Internet etc)?

Yes, see above.

1.13 Which skills are in short supply?

Computer knowledge for older adults. Time might be low for dual income families.

1.14 To what extent are these skills and resources differentially distributed across the community? (i.e. do some groups have more access to resources and more skill to use them than others)

Most meeting venues and libraries with computers and photocopiers are located towards the East of Flower Mound. Residents in the West might have fewer opportunities to access these resources.

2. Like to

This factor rests on the idea that people's felt sense of community encourages them to engage. The argument is that if you feel a part of something then you are more willing to engage. Evidence from many studies confirms that where people feel a sense of togetherness or shared commitment they are more willing to participate. This concern about a sense of attachment to the political entity where participation is at stake has been given new impetus in recent years in relation to debates about social capital. A sense of trust, connection and linked networks can, according to the social capital argument, enable people to work together and co-operate more effectively. Sense of community can be a strong motivator for participation. Conversely, an absence of identity or commitment to a locality can militate against participation.

The questions in this section focus particularly on the sense of identity and community that exists in the locality and associated stocks of social capital (in terms of trust and reciprocity).

Identity

- 2.1 What is the main focus of identity for people? (either select 1 from the list below or rank into order of importance).

A neighbourhood within the municipality **44%**

A community of interest/identity that spans several neighbourhoods (e.g. ethnic or cultural identity)? **15%**

The administrative unit of the municipality (e.g. town/city)? **26%**

An area bigger than the municipality (e.g. region/sub-region)? **11%**

Nation state **3%**

- 2.2 How well do people in the same neighbourhood tend to know each other?
Know [1 - 3 - 5] Don't Know // 2.74 (0.75)
- 2.3 How much do citizens identify with the municipality (i.e. 'felt identity')?
Strong Sense [1 - 3 - 5] Low Sense // 2.8 (1.01)
- 2.4 How attached are people to the area in which they live?
Very Attached [1 - 3 - 5] Unattached // 2.07 (1.05)

Homogeneity

- 2.5 Is the community a stable one with a strong sense of history and tradition? (this might be measured by examining the length of time that people have lived at the same address or by a more informal sense of how homogenous the community is).
Very Stable [1 - 3 - 5] Unstable // 2.48 (0.91)
- 2.6 To what extent is there similarity of identity across the community (i.e. are people largely the same – and if not, where are the main cleavages)?
Very Similar [1 - 3 - 5] Very Diverse // 2.65 (0.91)
- 2.7 Are values and priorities the same across the community – and if not, where are the major cleavages?
Very Similar [1 - 3 - 5] Very Diverse // 2.62 (1.05)

Trust

- 2.8. Are people in this community most likely to be helpful to others or are they more likely to put their own self interest first?
Helpful [1 - 3 - 5] Self-interested // 2.48 (1.16)
- 2.9. Will most people in this community try to be fair or will they try to take advantage of others given the chance?
Fair [1 - 3 - 5] Take Advantage // 2.33 (0.85)
- 2.10. How much do citizens trust one another? (e.g. would one citizen lend a small amount of money, such as a bus fare, to another?)
High Trust [1 - 3 - 5] Low Trust // 2.51 (0.95)
- 2.11. How much do citizens trust the municipality to make decisions that are in the interest of the community as a whole?
High Trust [1 - 3 - 5] low Trust // 3.00 (0.94)
- 2.12. How much do citizens trust the national government to make decisions that are in the interest of the community as a whole?
High Trust [1 - 3 - 5] Low Trust // 4.40 (0.67)

Citizenship

- 2.13. Is there a strong community spirit that supports community action?
Strong Spirit [1 - 3 - 5] No Spirit // 2.25 (0.70)
- 2.14. Do people feel a sense of responsibility towards the community?
Very Responsible [1 - 3 - 5] Not Responsible // 2.40 (0.67)
- 2.15. Are there groups or sections of the community that are likely to feel excluded?
“seniors”, “Western part of Town”, “ethnic/religious minorities”, “natural gas rights owners”
- 2.16. Is there a sense in the municipality that the voices of some groups are more legitimate than others?
Sometimes; “long-time residents”, “developers”, “vocal groups”, “conservatives”

3. Enabled to

This factor is premised on the research observation that most participation is facilitated through groups or organisations. Political participation in isolation is more difficult and less sustainable (unless an individual is highly motivated) than the mutually reinforcing engagement of contact through groups and networks. Collective participation provides continuous reassurance and feedback that the cause of engagement is relevant and that participation is having some value. Indeed, for some, engagement in this manner is more important than the outcome of such participation. The existence of networks and groups which can support participation and which can provide a route into decision-makers, therefore, is vital to the vibrancy of participation in an area.

The questions in this section focus on the existence and membership of groups to support political participation, and the existence of a 'civic infrastructure' that can encourage the development of such groups and ensure that they remain connected with local decision-makers.

Types of civic organisation

3.1 What sorts of organisations exist and are active in the locality? (if it is possible to quantify these then even better)

Youth
 Environment
 Conservation
 Animal rights/protection
 Peace
 Humanitarian/human rights
 Social welfare (e.g. housing)
 Medical (e.g. patients associations)
 Sports/Hobby
 Parent/teacher
 Residents/neighbourhood
 Ethnicity based
 Cultural
 Religious/church based
 Other

3.2 Which of the above organisations have the most membership?

1. Sports/hobby 2. Religious/church based 3. Resident/neighborhood 4. Parent/

3.3 Which have the most influence on municipal decision-making?

teacher

1. Political 2. Environmental 3. Resident/neighborhood

3.4 Is the range of voluntary and community organisations in the area sufficient to address the full range of political issues that citizens may wish to engage in?

Yes (65.6%) / No (34.4%)

Activities

3.5 Is the voluntary and community sector in an active state?

Active [1 - 3 - 5] Inactive // 2.18 (0.67)

3.6 To what extent are voluntary and community organisations increasing their membership in the area?

Increasing [1 - 3 - 5] Decreasing // 2.44 (0.78)

- 3.7 To what extent are voluntary and community organisations seeking to influence decisions at the municipal level?

Active Influence [1 - 3 - 5] No Influence // 2.44 (0.78)

Civic infrastructure

- 3.8 Are there any voluntary or community organisations that exist specifically to support the development or growth of civic organisations in the area (e.g. 'umbrella' organisations such as Councils for Voluntary Service)?
Sort of; the Town will provide funding to some civic organizations if they meet criteria
- 3.9 Do these 'umbrella' organisations have sufficient resources and capacities to reach out to a range of organisations?
Not a full range of organizations
- 3.10 What support does the municipality give to voluntary and community organisations in its area?
All of the below, to some extent. Some organizations are going to have more access than others.
Financial support
Support from municipal staff
Use of municipal facilities
Access to other municipal resources
Access to decision-makers
- 3.11 What are the major weaknesses of the voluntary and community sector in the area? "few doing most work", "squeaky wheel", "awareness", "large time commitment", "position of the organization" compared to Town Council
- 3.12 What role does the local media play in relation to participation?
Little to none

4. Asked to

This factor builds on the finding of much research that mobilisation matters. People tend to become engaged more often and more regularly when they are asked to engage. Research shows that people's readiness to participate often depends upon whether or not they are approached and how they are approached. Mobilisation can come from a range of sources but the most powerful form is when those responsible for a decision ask others to engage with them in making the decision. Case studies have demonstrated how open political and managerial systems in local municipalities can also have a significant effect by extending a variety of invitations to participate to their citizens. The variety of participation options for engagement is important because some people are more comfortable with some forms of engagement such as a public meeting while others would prefer, for example, to engage through on-line discussions. Some people want to talk about the experiences of their community or neighbourhood while others want to engage based on their knowledge of a particular service as a user.

This section asks questions about the ways in which the municipality is seeking to engage with citizens, the variety of initiatives that it supports, and the way in which it communicates these initiatives to the public.

Forms of participation

4.1 In what ways does the municipality seek to engage citizens in decision-making processes?

Invites open comments on services
 Conducts Surveys/opinion polls
 Conducts regular panel survey of citizens
 Opens meetings to public
 Allows public to participate in meetings
 Co-opts citizens onto committees/meetings
 Holds public meetings
 Issues consultation documents
 Arranges area/neighbourhood forums
 Arranges other types of forum
 Conducts focus groups
 Holds citizens juries/panels
 Runs consultation events (e.g. visioning exercises)
 Other.....

4.2 Does the municipality seek to use the internet for engagement by:

Publishing all agendas, reports and other materials online?
 Providing email addresses for elected members?
 Holding online consultations?
 Using electronic means (email, SMS texts) to alert citizens to consultations?
 Providing online discussion forums?
 Other.....

Strategy

4.3 Does the municipality have a strategy for engagement or are initiatives more piecemeal?

Strategic [1 - 3 - 5] Piecemeal // 2.66 (0.75)

4.4 Does the municipality collaborate with any other organisations in consulting or engaging the public?

Occasionally

4.5 Does the municipality offer incentives to citizens to participate (e.g. honoraria, gifts, IT equipment, service enhancements, discounts on charges)

No

4.6 Are participation activities normally held at official premises? Has the municipality experimented with unusual locations to encourage participation (e.g. citizens' homes, schools, supermarkets)?

Yes. Some special events take place at other venues around the communities

Reach and diversity

(ie churches/school)

4.7 Are these forms of engagement sufficient to reach all the different sections of the community (young/old, ethnic minority groups etc)?

Sufficient [1 - 3 - 5] Insufficient // 2.81 (1.13)

4.8 On what basis are different forms of participation used (e.g. are some used specifically to reach particular groups)?

Yes for major planning initiatives (e.g. neighborhood forums, technology)

4.9 Do decision-makers give higher priority to the findings of some forms of participation over others (e.g. those that produce quantitative preferences)?

Generally equal; "public hearings and written comments"

5. Responded to

This final factor captures the idea that for people to participate on a sustainable basis they have to believe that their involvement is making a difference and that it is achieving positive benefits. For people to participate they have to believe that they are going to be listened to and, if not always agreed with, at least in a position to see that their view has been taken into account. Responsiveness is about ensuring feedback, which may not always be positive – in the sense of accepting the dominant view from participants. Feedback involves explaining how the decision was made and the role of participation within that. Response is vital for citizen education, and so has a bearing on the ‘front end’ of the process too.

This set of questions asks how different messages are weighed by decision-makers and how conflicting views are prioritised. They also examine how information on decision-making is fed back to citizens.

Listening

5.1 What are the procedures for ensuring that the citizen’s voice is considered in decision-making?

“Primarily public hearings”

5.2 What mechanisms are used to feed the results of particular consultation or participation initiatives into the decision-making process?

“written correspondence”, “public hearings”, “survey responses”, “HOA meetings”

Balance and prioritisation

5.3 How are the views of citizens balanced against the opinions of professionals and elected members, especially where they diverge?

“Survey results”, “written correspondence”, “public hearings”, “HOA meetings”

5.4 How good are decision-makers at understanding and taking into account the views of citizens?

Very good [1 - 3 - 5] Very poor // Residents- 2.70 (0.85); Municipality- 2.33 (0.42)

Feedback and education

5.5 How good is the municipality at explaining to citizens the reasons for the decision and the ways in which citizen views have been taken into account?

Very good [1 - 3 - 5] Very poor // Residents- 2.66 (0.75); Municipality- 2 (0)

5.6 To what extent do citizens understand and accept the decisions made by municipalities?

Content [1 - 3 - 5] Discontent // Residents- 2.96 (0.74); Municipality- 2.66 (0.16)

5.7 What efforts is the municipality making to better communicate its decisions to citizens? **“proactive” engagement, “evaluating opportunities to better communicate through multiple mediums”**

5.8 Does the municipality have a programme of citizen education in relation to participation?

No.

5.9 Does the municipality provide support to politicians and/or officers in learning how to respond more effectively to participation?

Not direct support or training.