



# Inclusive Community Engagement Toolkit

2022 Edition



# This Inclusive Community Engagement Toolkit was made possible by these partnering organizations:

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# Table of Contents

**Communities are made up of so many different people living incredibly different lives.** This is a document to guide those from small nonprofits, to local governments, to huge corporations in navigating how to include all people’s opinions, ideas, and experiences into decision making. This document was written to ensure that decisions, from a street paving project to a new governmental policy, are driven by the most diverse set of lived experiences – because then our communities, spaces, and policies work for everyone.

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Why Do We Need Inclusive Community Engagement?.....	4
What are Diversity, Equality, Equity, Inclusion?.....	6
What your organization can get when you have inclusive engagement .....	8
How to Use This Toolkit .....	9
Our Values .....	10
Pre-Assessment .....	11
Actions for Community Engagement .....	12
<b>Build a Foundation.....</b>	<b>13</b>
Know Your Community.....	14
Strengthen Your Resources .....	16
Identify and Overcome Barriers to Participation .....	18
Seek Out Community Input to Drive Decision-Making .....	20
<b>Seek and Provide Resources for Engagement.....</b>	<b>22</b>
Provide Funding and Flexibility for Engagement .....	23
Make Effective and Efficient Use of Community Resources.....	26
<b>Communicate Effectively .....</b>	<b>28</b>
Identify and Engage All Potential Stakeholders.....	29
Create Specific Engagement Efforts to Encourage a Diverse Set of Perspectives .....	32
Address Relevant Existing Policy and Procedure, History of the Issues, Alternatives, and Their Pros and Cons .....	34
Create a Transparent Process that Maximizes Trust and Community Building .....	36
<b>Provide Closure .....</b>	<b>38</b>
Inform Affected Communities of All Outcomes of the Process and Continue to Cultivate Relationships .....	39
Conclusion .....	42
Working Social Justice Glossary .....	43
Citations.....	46
Appendix.....	47

# Why Do We Need Inclusive Community Engagement?

**Across the United States, decision-making processes often ignore or exclude certain community members' needs.**

The exclusion of these needs is built into our processes, making them systemic. There is an imbalance of power between community members of agent **social identity** groups such as white and wealthy families, and members of targeted **social identity** groups such as low-income, single-parent, and Black families.

When a group of people is left out of the decision-making, then the process does not work for everyone. When we make an effort to include every voice, especially those voices that have two jobs, are struggling, who don't have a car to get around, then we build a stronger community – a community for everyone.

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**This imbalance is due to differences in access to decision-making processes (e.g., voting, City Council meetings, public meetings, advocacy groups) across different identities, and it builds upon itself.**

For example, people in **agent identity groups** might have more time to participate in government processes and the ability to pay for childcare during the meetings. Even the mere availability to attend those meetings, which is afforded by working a day job, is an advantage. Because people in these groups are more easily able to participate, their needs are more often prioritized by decision makers.

In contrast, people in **target identity groups** may work a second or third shift job and can't make a nighttime meeting, are non-white, or cannot drive a car because of a disability or inability to afford one.

**Agent:** Individuals who belong to social identity groups that have ready access to resources that enhance one's chances of getting what one wants and influencing others. Those with **social power** and **privilege**.

**Target:** A group consisting of individuals who are denied access to resources that enhance one's chances of getting what one wants and influencing others because of their **social identity**. Those with less or without **social power**.<sup>1</sup>



## The outcomes of these processes then continue to benefit the agent group members and neglect the needs of targeted groups, leading to an increased power imbalance between these groups.

Because targeted groups don't have as much access to decision-making processes, our government relies more heavily on the opinions of professionals (i.e., an engineer who has years of education but doesn't live in a certain neighborhood, a well-informed researcher who has a lot of subject matter knowledge but little on the ground experience) instead of the lived experiences of *all* community members.

To be **inclusive** means to not only acknowledge the existence of systemic **racism** and **oppression**, but also work to change the systems. Therefore, an inclusive community engagement process is one that identifies the causes of these power imbalances and deliberately involves specific strategies

to address and overcome them — bringing everyone to the table and **empowering** participation from all, and especially, targeted voices. This inclusive community engagement process will then break the cycles causing differences in power and is intended to serve as a guide for any group — whether it's a nonprofit organization, academic research team, or governmental department — working to identify and address community members' needs.

This process is based on our review of successful processes across the globe and adapted to address the barriers faced by communities across the United States.



### Who created this toolkit?

Local Motion is a transportation advocacy nonprofit in Columbia, Missouri. Though its early efforts focused primarily on trails, health, and recreation, in recent years it has committed its resources to advocating for improved transportation **equity**.

This shift is important to us because transportation is the foundation of a person's ability to access their basic needs (e.g., food, healthcare, school, work, family) and therefore thrive. Transportation **equity** means accommodating the needs of people who walk, bike, and take the bus, making streets more accessible and safer for all road users.

# What Are Diversity, Equality, Equity, and Inclusion?

Let's use transportation as an example to show the difference between **diversity, equality, equity, and inclusion.**



There are many modes of transportation on our streets — bikes, cars, trains, buses, walking, using a wheelchair, scooters, and many more. That is **diversity.**



**Equality** is designing our streets with equal access to sidewalks, bike lanes, bus stops, lanes for driving and other transportation infrastructure equally, even if those sidewalks might be cracked and broken or those bike lanes might have debris in them.

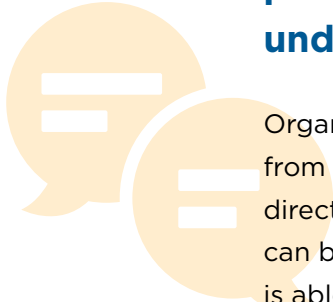


When a street *prioritizes* people who are most at risk of being seriously injured or killed while traveling — people walking, biking and taking the bus — by building protected bike lanes, wide sidewalks, safe and accessible bus stops, that is **equity.**



Street projects should include a public process incorporating ample insight from people who walk, bike, and take the bus to get where they need to go. Public engagement should include residents who don't own or drive a car; and people with disabilities. Target Identity voices should have a seat at the toolkiting table to give feedback and decide the who, what, where, how and why of street project design and construction. That is **inclusion.**

## Equitable community engagement benefits organizations and governmental bodies by providing feedback from people who are typically underrepresented in city processes.



Organizations often use data collected from surveys and focus groups to help direct their work, but these resources can be greatly biased depending on who is able, willing, and asked to participate.

For example, Local Motion’s annual community survey asked residents to rank and prioritize quality of life issues related to public transportation, including the construction of roads, streets and sidewalks. In 2019, 52% of respondents reported having a household income of \$100,000 per year or greater, which is more than twice Columbia’s median household income of \$41,000.

Realizing that the Local Motion’s strategic direction had been designed around the priorities of wealthy Columbians, Local Motion researched and adopted practices for including populations with lower incomes, people with disabilities, people of color, and

other **marginalized** groups. Valuable input from these groups has given us the context to sharpen our focus on transportation **equity**.

When creating toolkits based on citizen input, Local Motion typically hires consultants to facilitate community engagement. Still, these efforts often fail to engage neighbors from Columbia’s **Vision Zero Priority Neighborhoods**.

These are neighborhoods with a high proportion of people of color, low-income households, and households with no vehicles.

Beyond giving community members an opportunity to be heard, Local Motion believes the most vulnerable and disproportionately impacted should be the central focus on project outcomes. We can’t simply create “values” while also operating on toolkits that consistently ignore underrepresented groups.

When we refer to **Vision Zero Priority Neighborhoods** throughout this document, we are referring to communities of color, low-income households, and households with no vehicles.

# What Your Organization Can Get When You Have Inclusive Engagement

**With additional people in the room, teams bring more diverse thoughts and experiences, and can create increased accountability.**

According to a [Cloverpop<sup>2</sup> study](#), over 500 business decisions across over 150 companies revealed a great deal about what **diversity** and **inclusion** mean for decision making:



Teams make better, more-informed decisions than individuals **66% of the time.**



People of different **genders, ages,** and **cultural backgrounds** are **better for decision-making.**



The study found that diverse perspectives lead to **better decisions 87% of the time.**



**Inclusion**, authentic and **empowered** participation, and a true sense of belonging boost decision execution and **drive results by 60%.**

**Inclusive community engagement will create similar outcomes.**

**When we include more voices and experiences, and empower folks to participate in decisions that affect their community, we create places made with more people in mind.**



# How to Use this Toolkit

When systems and procedures are truly inclusive, individuals, organizations, and community groups feel **empowered** to work together and create change.

As you look through this toolkit, keep in mind that the actions outlined here might not be relevant for every project. **Think of it as a list of key ingredients rather than a step-by-step recipe.**

Toolkits will vary depending on the people you are trying to reach, resources, and needs of the community.

## This toolkit includes the following sets of materials for governments, community organizations, and service providers:

**Our Values** are adapted from the International Association for Public Participation. These values are intrinsic to every advocacy campaign we hold and are ever-changing with our experiences and input from the community.

**The Pre-Assessment** guides you in evaluating your current levels of equitable and inclusive community engagement. We realize that these changes will not always come quickly, and this pre-assessment will show you key areas for improvement.

**Actions** for community organizations and municipalities to direct engagement work. These are arranged in five essential areas of activity and include researched best practices.

**Working Social Justice Definitions** can be hard to differentiate and remember, so we included a list from the National Conference for Community and Justice of Metropolitan St. Louis (NCCJ St. Louis) Facilitrainer program. Where you see a word bolded in green, there is a corresponding definition at the end of this document.



Photo by Jonathan Asher

# Our Values

- 1** Community engagement is based on the belief that **those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.**
- 2** Community engagement includes the promise that **the public's contribution will influence the decision.**
- 3** Community engagement **promotes continuous compromises** by addressing the needs of all participants, including decision makers.
- 4** Community engagement **meets people where they are** and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
- 5** Community engagement is designed by participants in a way that **makes engagement easy, comfortable, and accessible.**
- 6** Community engagement provides participants affected by a decision with the **information and history they need to participate in a meaningful way.**
- 7** Community engagement **communicates to participants how their input affected the decision** to promote trust and future participation in decision-making.

Our Core Values<sup>3</sup> are adapted from



# Pre-Assessment

Use this pre-assessment to gauge the specific action areas that you may need to hone in on and improve to make your community engagement more inclusive and effective.

This assessment encourages improving your community engagement process in bite-sized pieces rather than trying to do everything at once. You will add up your final scores for each section to show how well you're doing and what you can improve on for your ongoing engagement.

The sections in the Pre-Assessment correspond with the *Actions for Community Engagement*. So, when you take the Pre-Assessment and have a lower score in some sections over others, take the steps to work on those specific sections!

[Click here to take the Pre-Assessment](#)



Photo by Jonathan Asher

# Actions for Community Engagement



## Where do we go from here?

We know that our current methods for facilitating community engagement *are not working*. The voices, opinions, and lived experiences of some groups are often left out of the conversation — and have been for decades.

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**Being able to advocate for yourself is a **privilege**, and there are so many barriers to participate in community decisions.**

Many folks, especially Black and brown communities, don't have access to transportation, childcare, time, knowledge about meeting times, and the trust that their voices will be heard and their input valued.

In this section, we illustrate direct actions that local governments, municipalities, organizations, or groups can take to open up new avenues of communication.

**We divide these actions into four sections:**

**1. Build a Foundation**

**2. Seek and Provide Resources for Engagement**

**3. Communicate Effectively**

**4. Provide Closure**

# **1** Build a Foundation

**Before identifying issues or making specific plans, you must understand current community concerns.**

Get to know your community — determine the issues that matter most to people and the assets already present that can be called upon to address those issues.

# Know your Community

## Who makes up your community? How do they spend their time? What are their values and needs?

Create and maintain a database of records and data about ongoing engagement efforts across the city so that residents' needs and concerns are understood.

Use **United States Census Bureau** resources to inform your engagement. People of different incomes, **rac**es, **ability** statuses, and other social identities all live different experiences.

Which neighborhoods prefer Neighborhood Association meetings to hear about new projects? Which area responds more to public events at local parks or destinations? If this information isn't already established, talk to people in the neighborhood and record their responses for present and future community engagement. **Identify overlooked areas** (i.e., underrepresented neighborhoods) **and create a communication toolkit for overcoming them.**

This communication toolkit should be unique to each neighborhood or target area. People in some areas might prefer to be engaged during certain times of the day or week, others might prefer door-to-door fliers versus social media engagement.

Meeting people where they already are is an effective use of everyone's time, especially for people who work multiple jobs, can't always afford

child care, and have limited time. This could mean setting up a table to distribute informational materials or meeting folks at community events, neighborhood meetings, and service organizations.

Learn the schedules of community members (i.e., shift workers, food service employees). People working shifts at factories have very different time constraints than people working at a grocery store or bank do.

### Did you know?

The United States Census Bureau has tables, maps, and data profiles on community demographics like **race**, income, number of people in each household, what households own a car, etc. Oftentimes cities will make this data accessible to the community as well. This information is essential to inclusive community engagement because you have to know your audience in order to engage them. [www.census.gov/data.html](http://www.census.gov/data.html)

# Know your Community



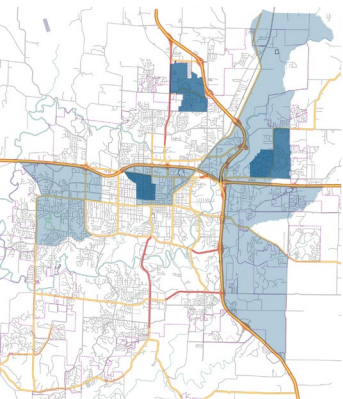
Engagement  
in Action

**At Local Motion, we conduct an annual Community Survey to gauge people's transportation needs and barriers.**

**Transportation is essential to getting where people need and want to go:** work, school, childcare, places to access healthy food, and other services. We want to know why people use certain modes of transportation (e.g., public transit, wheelchairs, walking, driving, biking) and why (i.e., they can't afford a car, certain disabilities prevent them from driving).

**If they don't take the bus, why not?**

*Who* is walking, biking, and taking public transportation out of necessity? To make this survey successful and representative of *everyone* in Columbia, we have to make sure it's truly reflective of the communities here.



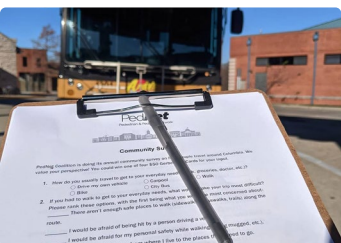
**We maintain census data on *who lives where* in Columbia.**

To your left is a map of *Vision Zero Priority Neighborhoods* — neighborhoods with low car ownership but high pedestrian deaths, a high percentage of low-income families, and communities of color.

**We use this map to determine where we allocate extra time and resources to collect survey responses to better represent the community as a whole.** This is not to say that we do not reach out to neighborhoods not highlighted on this map, but we know that the highlighted neighborhoods have inequitable access to resources like time, childcare, and meeting spaces.

**We also keep records of what kind of engagement works better for each neighborhood.** For example, in the central neighborhood, we have recorded high numbers of responses when we set up tables at bus stations and community events providing snacks and engagement rather than sending out a survey newsletter.

We know that for our Local Motion membership base (86% white and 55% making more than \$60,000/year) that newsletters work. **We know that for families with lower incomes, in-person surveys are far more effective.**



[Click here for an Example Survey](#)

# Strengthen your Resources

**Create a volunteer and leadership development program that is accessible for all people.**

This means creating flexible meeting times, providing childcare and meals during program hours, and hosting meetings at different locations depending on where people live and work. **Pay your leaders a stipend for their time.**

**You don't have to engage the community alone.** Identify community partners who already are working within the same realm to co-lead the effort. Contact nonprofit organizations, community centers, service organizations, and places of worship. There are likely people already working in the community you want to engage in, and they can give powerful and insightful information about how best to engage.







# Strengthen your Resources

**Local Motion could not work toward our goal of improving transportation equity without the important insights from our organizational partners and our Neighborhood Leadership Council.**

The Neighborhood Leadership Council is a group of **trusted advocates** who live or work in our Vision Zero Priority Neighborhoods. The neighborhood leaders are largely **BIPOC**, people with disabilities, low-income, or don't own cars.

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**We make meetings with our Neighborhood Leaders accessible** by asking when they are able to meet, paying for meals and providing childcare during meetings, and offering transportation to and from meetings.

We create meeting times to accommodate the schedules of our Neighborhood Leaders, reach out to them based on their preferred communication style (e.g., email, text, call), and meet with them individually if that is more convenient for them.

We also provide our Neighborhood Leaders with a monthly stipend of \$225 for their time meeting with us and with people in their communities. **By fostering relationships with community leaders, we can be better informed about how to shape transportation projects and advocate for policies.**



# Identify and Overcome Barriers to Participation

Identifying and overcoming barriers to participation can be as simple as recognizing what prevents people from participating in decision-making.

Oftentimes, people don't come to meetings because they don't know they are happening in the first place, not because they don't care or don't want to have a voice in the decision. Adapt your engagement practices to those you are trying to reach.

**1** **What does your population group look like?** If you're trying to reach young people, have youth groups or school clubs help run and toolkit events so the activities toolkited are appealing to them.

**2** **It's important to identify and meet the specific accessibility needs of the community to encourage participation.** Does the group you're trying to reach speak a different language? Does it include people with disabilities? Examples include providing a translator, bringing in culturally appropriate food or meals from a local restaurant in that area, or making sure there is technology on hand for people with audio or visual disabilities.

**3** **A huge barrier to attending meetings is simply time.** Does this group of folks work night jobs? Do they work at a shift job? Identify, through door knocking, surveys, or community leaders, specific needs of participants based on the time and day of engagement.

**4** **If someone doesn't have reliable transportation or can't drive a car, getting to a meeting is a difficult barrier.** Do they have trouble getting to the area of town where meetings are often held? Hold several meetings at different times and locations. Hold meetings in accessible places, not just City buildings. If you are trying to reach people to discuss a project in the northern part of your City, then hold the meeting there. In every part of town, there is most likely a school, library, community building, church, or food destination near a project area. Use these destinations as meeting spaces to provide familiarity and accessibility for the people you want to engage.

**5** **Childcare is expensive and bringing your child to a public meeting is stressful and often results in people not participating unless they have access to childcare resources.** Do most people have young children that need childcare in the evenings? Hold meetings during times and days of the week where most people can come and participate or be ready to provide childcare services and food for people who don't have the time and money to miss a meal and pay for their own childcare.

## There are a lot of factors and barriers that go into people attending or skipping a public event.

But the more knowledge you have, the more surveys, the more doors you knock and people you speak to, the better you can toolkit and the more voices you'll have at the table making decisions about the community. The best part of

knowing your audience and the barriers they face to participating is that you only have to figure it out once - then for future engagement you know what a neighborhood needs and how they prefer to get involved.\*

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*\*We know communities ebb and flow. So, periodically you may have to change the way you engage, but usually those changes are slow and once you create a relationship with people in a neighborhood, hopefully you can see those changes coming before they affect your inclusive engagement.*

## Identify and Overcome Barriers to Participation

### We believe public transit can solve so many transportation struggles in any city, but especially in a place like Columbia.

Columbia is a college town with a significant population of people who already use the bus system and a group who would use — and benefit from — a convenient, accessible, and widespread public transportation system if it existed.

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At Local Motion, we wanted to hear from folks who use the bus as their primary form of transportation. To overcome barriers to participation, we went to the local bus station and set up a table with information on our organization, fliers about transportation **equity**, food, water, and surveys at the local bus station. Yes, some people who take the bus might answer a social media ad for a survey or respond to an email, but we knew we could get more robust responses if we met with people in person. Ultimately, if we create a bus system that works for people who have no other option than to ride the bus, it will work for everyone.



**Engagement  
in Action**

### A note about surveys:

Surveys can be fantastic tools for collecting community input. However, surveys often are disproportionately received by folks who already are civically involved, so responses are typically skewed toward certain demographics. To achieve better representation, it's important to release the survey in multiple ways.

For example, a city is releasing a survey about how to proceed with a project and releases it in the press and on the city website. People who are civically engaged will see it, but the majority won't. In this situation, it would help to take the survey into neighborhoods and ask people to fill it out. Opportunities include knocking on doors, attending neighborhood association meetings, or setting up tables at local parks with some snacks and information about the project as well as the survey. Additionally, social media ads are a great way to broaden an organization's reach.

# Seek Out Community Input to Drive Decision-Making

**During any large-scale engagement, it's important to ask for feedback from participants.**

How did they feel about the location of the meeting? The time? What would enable them to come to more meetings and spend more time sharing insight on how a project can best serve them? **Seek input from people or organizations within the community regarding how to better engage affected parties.** Again, you don't need to do this alone. Nonprofits, organizations and city governments exist for a reason: to be resources for people who want to improve the quality of life for people.

Ask these resources about how they engaged the community and be open to feedback about how you can improve your current engagement toolkit. **Community input drives decision-making and power, not just regarding the final decision, but also the process that led to it.**



# Seek Out Community Input to Drive Decision-Making



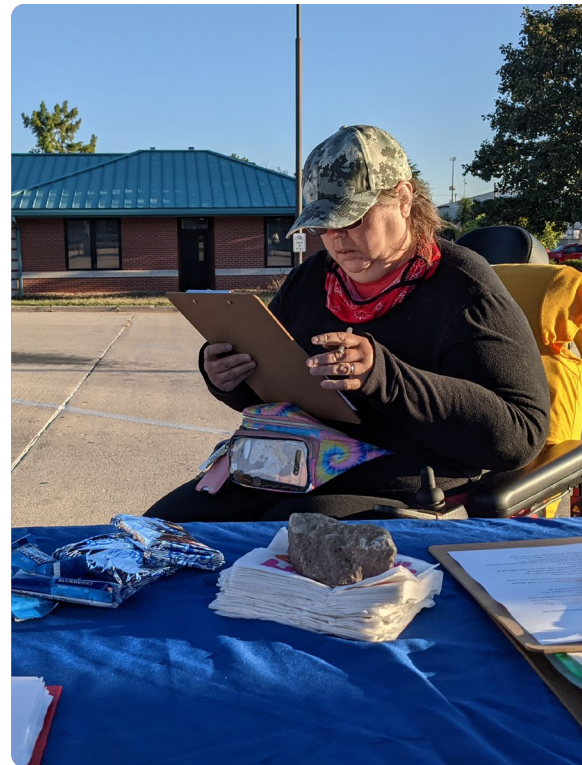
Engagement  
in Action

**Our Neighborhood Leader Council includes many people with different commitments, backgrounds, and time constraints.**

When we engage with them, we make it a priority to ask how they prefer to be contacted (email, text, or call) about meetings. We encourage feedback about where our meetings are located, the food we provide, and what resources they need to be able to participate in the program.

**Additionally, we seek the input of other organizations and community leaders about how to equitably engage the public.**

For example, for our annual Community Survey we met with our Neighborhood Leaders as well as local leaders and **equity** organizations to broaden our reach to include service organizations and people in our community who are consistently overlooked for their opinions on city projects. We made a spreadsheet of who we are trying to reach, the method or location we are using to reach them, and other details. One local leader helped us specifically reach out to the unhoused community, advising us on where to go, whom to speak to, and how to respectfully engage folks.



[Click here for an example of a Community Engagement Project Plan](#)

# **2** Seek and Provide Resources for Engagement

**Inclusive engagement requires resources like money, staffing, and time.**

But you don't need every resource to start engaging all people in a community. Start small and work toward the resources you need.

# Provide Funding and Flexibility for Engagement

## Provide funding to meet the engagement needs in your community.

Hire and train enough **Community Engagement Specialists (CES)\*** for the organization, government, or entity to enable extensive community engagement and involvement. This title may vary by organization, but the position role should align with those described here.

Coordinating community engagement can be taxing, logistically complicated, and no single person can handle equitable engagement alone.

*\*This is just a Local Motion position title. A community engagement staff person title is up to the organization hiring said staff person, but their roles should be similar to those described in this document.*

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## For example, a city should have at least one Community Engagement Specialist for each city ward to reach and engage people.

A CES is informed of upcoming projects and is well-experienced in how to engage the community the project directly affects. Training in facilitation, **equity**, and engagement strategies is necessary for this position.

This person is the lead organizer of engagement events and communication,

understands which types of communications and events are well-received by the population they're trying to reach, possesses deep knowledge of an area's demographics (e.g., **race**, income, number of households), and has experience or training in **equity** and facilitating community engagement.

# Provide Funding and Flexibility for Engagement

**In addition to hiring a CES, it's helpful to designate one or more staff members for each engagement effort.**

Most institutions (e.g., schools, colleges, nonprofits) show the most productive engagement and participation with an 18:1 ratio, or 18 people for every one staff person. These staff members will attend meetings with the CES, take notes, share information, help with technology logistics, etc.

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**Create a detailed project budget, including costs of hiring a CES person, if not already hired, before the final project is decided on.**

For example, if a city is toolkitting to pave a street along a densely populated neighborhood, **you must include community engagement in that project cost and timeline.**

This could mean time for a CES and staff to attend meetings, meals and childcare provided for community members attending meetings, meeting room reservations, supplies for fliers or other engagement tools, and accommodations for people with disabilities.

**To equitably and effectively engage the community, hard timelines don't always work.**

Maintain flexibility and make space for adjustments within the larger project structure. Effective community engagement depends on how many people show up. **Give your project timeline enough cushion to allow enough time and at least three attempts to reach people in the project area.**

The amount of time and flexibility you have for community engagement will change from project to project, which is why, when a project is initiated, community engagement needs to be at the forefront of the toolkitting process.



# Provide Funding and Flexibility for Engagement



Engagement  
in Action

**At Local Motion, we led a major advocacy campaign focused on adding trails in areas of town that were disconnected from the existing trail system.**

We were especially interested in hearing from people in low-income neighborhoods, neighborhoods with a high proportion of people of color, and neighborhoods that have low car ownership and are not on transit routes. The trails would be funded by a recurring **Park Sales Tax (PST)**.

However, these trails didn't make the PST project list and were considered lower priority than sports fields and venues. Our goal was to drum up enough support for these trails and transportation **equity** projects to have them added to the priority project list.

Before starting, we estimated the amount of money we would need to

create and print fliers, door hangers, postcard mailers, funds for a pre-City Council engagement party, hiring a **BIPOC** caterer, working with our Neighborhood Leaders and their communities, and employee hours to go out into the community to talk to people in neighborhoods about how these trails could increase trail access for everyone, not just wealthier neighborhoods.

We didn't just rally our members, who are a majority white and wealthy, to come to the City Council to advocate for these trails. **We made it a priority to create equitable engagement opportunities for people actually living in the neighborhoods that the trails would be built in.**

[Click here to see an example PST Budget](#)

[Click here to see an example PST Timeline](#)

[Click here to see example PST Materials](#)



**Meet Sophia Smith!** Sophia owns a number of businesses in Columbia, MO including Grandma's Southern Eats, Sophia's Helping Hand, and Sophia's Support Services and she is a Local Motion Neighborhood Leader. Sophia has worked with us for over 2 years and has been integral in educating us on how to create community connections: working *with* community members and not *using* them for their input.

# Make Effective and Efficient Use of Community Resources

**Community engagement is not a project that an organization, person, or entity is made to take on alone.**

**If possible, connect your outreach goals with ongoing community-based work.**

For example, if you know of a nonprofit or neighborhood association that is already seeking input on a project — or just holding a community event — ask to partner with their efforts to ease toolkiting, facilitating conversations with the community, and financial costs of engagement.

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**Learn from subject-matter experts about what background information residents need in order to make informed decisions.**

**Be as transparent as possible to cultivate trust and mutual collaboration.** For example, if you work for the city and are engaging the community about a street paving project, make sure you collect all of the information you need to give the public as much information as possible, including the history of that road, what it used to look like, and what it could look like with the new project.

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Connect with city engineers, city employees, and transportation **equity** nonprofits about the possible end

results. If time is a constraint, consider bringing subject matter experts to the engagement meetings to have the best information possible.

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A great way to integrate the communities you're working with is to have residents present project information to residents during community engagement meetings. **Communities are much more likely to engage with folks they already know and feel comfortable with.** This could look like reaching out to a local community leader, a Neighborhood Association president, or community organizations you know have relationships with the public. **Give power to members of the community to lead efforts.**

## This cannot be emphasized enough:

Two-way communication leads to productive engagement. The goal of this document is not to have cities or organizations lead community engagement to simply say that they did it, but rather to foster truly open conversations with people in the community whose lives will be affected by a project. When you effectively and inclusively engage the community, you build relationships and trust beyond just one project or timeline.



# Make Effective and Efficient Use of Community Resources

**At Local Motion, we have a group of Neighborhood Leaders who work with us to gauge community needs and transportation issues.**

When we need community engagement to guide the development of new projects, we can rely on these leaders to gather people from their neighborhoods to give input and provide us with information. Without our Neighborhood Leaders, we would not be able to equitably and efficiently get community input in a town the size of Columbia. More importantly, **when we host meetings in the community or focus groups, a Neighborhood Leader can be there as a friendly and familiar face for other people attending.**

To identify Neighborhood Leaders, Local Motion focused on areas where we wanted to improve transportation access and infrastructure. Then, Local Motion reached out to local organizations, neighborhood associations, places of worship, and community resource entities to find people who value **equity** and are interested in working on transportation accessibility.\*

*\*Local Motion has grant funding from the Missouri Foundation for Health (MFH) to pay Neighborhood Leaders a monthly stipend of \$225 for their time in working with us. Time and money are often barriers to participation and MFH agreed that paying those working with us would help alleviate those barriers.*

[Click here for a guide on how to host an effective meeting](#)



# 3

# Communicate Effectively

**Once an issue has been identified, everyone potentially interested in or affected by an initiative must be given an opportunity to be heard.**

Reach out to those residents who have a vested interest in finding a solution by using a variety of communication methods tailored to each audience.

# Identify and Engage All Potential Stakeholders

**A great way to effectively engage people in a community is to meet people where they are.**

This could be at a community event where your organization pays to have a table at the event or the organizer gives you permission to hand out information about the project and gather input.

**If you're trying to engage people from a specific neighborhood, go to a park or public space in that neighborhood** with informational materials and have conversations with people there. You also can look at calendars published by other organizations, places of worship, and city departments, to see what events are taking place. Contacting the event leader or a community leader beforehand can establish trust and gain another person to help spread the word about your work — this is often preferable to your showing up somewhere unannounced.



**Bonus:** Incentives work for getting people to have conversations and participate. If you are tabling at an event or public space (e.g., the bus station, food bank, public health building), bring food or other items to draw folks to your table.

# Identify and Engage All Potential Stakeholders

Use the most recent United States Census Data from *Build a Foundation* to get current demographic information about the surrounding community.

Is this a low-income area?  
Do people own their homes?  
Do they own cars? What are the **rac**es and ethnicities of stakeholders in the project area? Use this data to make your engagement **inclusive**.

For example, if your project is in a neighborhood with a majority low-income immigrant population, don't have your event or public input session in the center of town, serve pizza, and expect everyone to speak English as their first language.

## Four major reasons people don't provide input on projects

are they cannot get to the meetings, the meetings are held during work hours, would-be attendees don't have time to eat beforehand, and they cannot afford childcare during a meeting.

If you're not already getting public input at a community event, try hosting a scheduled public input session in the area where the project will take place. **Serve culturally appropriate food purchased from local businesses.** Provide childcare for people so parents of young children are able to focus on the project and their input. If you know English is not the predominant first language for this neighborhood, provide a translator to ease communication barriers.

**Make sure to host multiple public input sessions at different times and days of the week** so that people who work shift jobs and can't make it to one session have the opportunity to make it to another.

**When you host public input events, make sure to invite local organizations that might also have an interest in the project.**

For example, if you are hosting a public input on a street-calming project, don't invite only community members and people from neighborhood associations. Reach out to organizations that might work on transportation advocacy issues, local businesses, and direct-service organizations to not only give input but also their expertise on how that project will hurt or improve the community and its access to basic needs and resources. This way you can also have outsider expert knowledge on how the project or proposal will affect the surrounding community in both the short and long term.

**Inclusion:** The action or state of including, or of being included, in a group or structure. More than simply diversity and numerical representation, inclusion involves authentic and empowered participation and a true sense of belonging.

# Identify and Engage All Potential Stakeholders



Engagement  
in Action

## Local Motion received a few grants that required focus groups as a resource to gather public input.

When we toolkited to host these **focus groups**, we wanted to make sure we held meetings in the areas where people lived so that they wouldn't need a car to access the meeting space, provided childcare, served culturally appropriate food, and compensated participants for their time.

To do this, we analyzed 2020 United States Census data and the City of Columbia's *Vision Zero Priority Neighborhood* data (i.e., neighborhoods with low car ownership but high pedestrian deaths, a high percentage of low-income families, and communities of color) to determine demographics for the area (i.e., households without a vehicle, race, income) and **utilized our**

**Neighborhood Leaders' expertise, as these focus-group sessions were held in the neighborhoods where they live or work.**

Varied advertising methods became a huge part of fostering a diverse set of focus group participants. We advertised for these focus groups with social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram) ads and posted to local Facebook groups, posted fliers at the bus station and target area bus stops, shared focus group information with local direct service organizations and nonprofits and asked our neighborhood leaders to recruit people that they know who have transportation issues.

**What we learned:** It can be hard to measure the success of something like a focus group but there was more that we could have done and recorded to ensure a successful round of focus groups, like the demographics of people that already showed up, how the folks heard about the focus groups, and how we can reach out to them in the future.

**Focus Groups:** A focus group is used to gather people's opinions, ideas, and beliefs on a certain topic or product. While surveys or questionnaires can be useful, they can not capture what a person is thinking or feeling. This is where a focus group will come into play. Responses in a focus group are open ended, broad, and qualitative. They provide more depth and get closer to what people are really thinking and feeling even though their responses may be harder or even impossible to record on a scale.

[Click here for example costs of focus groups](#)

[Click here for an Inclusive Focus Group To-Do List](#)

[Click here to see examples of focus group fliers](#)



# Create Specific Engagement Efforts to Encourage a Diverse Set of Perspectives

**Community engagement is not just about reaching out to and maintaining relationships with individuals.**

Community engagement also is about establishing trust and working collaboratively with organizations, city staff, and nonprofits, between public and private partners. Establishing a relationship with these could be as simple as reaching out with an email or phone call to set up an initial meeting. **You could even have a collaborative meeting with several groups at once.**

Talk about future plans for a project or proposal. Then, when this project comes about, you can rely on these organizations for expertise, support, and contacts for individuals who might want to give input about this project.

When you go out into the community to an event or host an input event, you can

invite these organizations to establish trust with individual community members as well.

**At community events or engagement sessions, be sure to get input with your type of engagement for the area.**

Would the people there like to be alerted of events or projects in another way? What worked for them and what didn't?

Establish a relationship with an organization that specializes in **equity**. This organization, with a **livable wage** for time, can offer project toolkit changes based on how your project or toolkit will affect **equity** in the community. Fill out the **Equity Impact Assessment** in the following *Engagement in Action Tip*. Then, use that information and the input from the community to adjust your project or proposal with the least amount of impact on **equity**.

**Living Wage:** The living wage shown is the hourly rate that an *individual* in a household must earn to support his or herself and their family.<sup>4</sup> Use a **Livable Wage Calculator** based on your state, county, and the factors listed (i.e., number of children, number of people in household working). Consider not paying everyone the same wage and create a wage based on someone's living situation and paying them as much as possible and not just the livable wage. Consider whether you want to pay community engagement folks hourly, bi-weekly, or monthly.

**Equity:** Equity is often conflated with the term "Equality" which means sameness and assumes, incorrectly, that everyone has had equal access, treatment, and outcomes. In fact, the need to work towards equity implies that an individual or group may need to experience or receive something different (not equal) in order to attain outcomes similar to privileged groups.





# Create Specific Engagement Efforts to Encourage a Diverse Set of Perspectives

**Local Motion received a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency regarding motor vehicle transportation and the inequities in air pollution and health impacts.**

The research in this grant requires public input from neighborhoods that include significant **BIPOC** communities, low-income communities, and households that don't own cars.

Local Motion is an advocacy group with expertise in transportation **equity**, but the majority of our organization is white and able-bodied. To meet the requirements of this grant, we reached out to several organizations to create relationships, and then collaborated with them. A climate activist and racial **equity** organization were willing to meet with us and partner on the grant. **With our funds, we also were able to compensate these organizations for their time and expertise.**

Working with these other organizations allows us to expand our public engagement beyond our members and established individual and community relationships to **establish deeper and more meaningful understandings.**

**BIPOC** stands for **Black, Indigenous, and people of color**. Pronounced "bye-pock," this is a term specific to the United States, intended to center the experiences of Black and Indigenous groups and demonstrate solidarity between communities of color.

[Click here for an example email to a new organization to work with](#)

[Click here for the Equity Impact Assessment Worksheet](#)

# Address Relevant Existing Policy and Procedure, History of the Issues, Alternatives, and Their Pros and Cons

**When you're hosting a public engagement or input meeting, you can't assume that everyone attending knows the project's technical details or even how the project process works.**

Present the information you provide at a meeting **as if you're speaking to someone who has no experience or knowledge of the field.** Emphasize why this project is happening and the history of why this project needs to happen.

**Why is it important? What benefits will it bring to the community?** For example, the city government is toolkitting a street maintenance project. You cannot just provide the technical toolkits for this project and expect people to understand them. Try to use the simplest terms possible, use visual aids, include community examples that people are likely to be familiar with, and be prepared for people to ask you to explain the project's technical details.

Lay out a step-by-step process from approval of the project all the way through the budget, toolkits, options, and what happens after the public input process when the toolkits are finalized and construction starts.

Additionally, **emphasize why this project is happening and the history of why this project needs to happen.** What did the project area look like in the past? What worked? What didn't work? What are the realistic limitations of the project and where can there be discussions and new ideas? Transparency not only strengthens relationships between the public and an organization, but it also leads to less confusion throughout any project process.

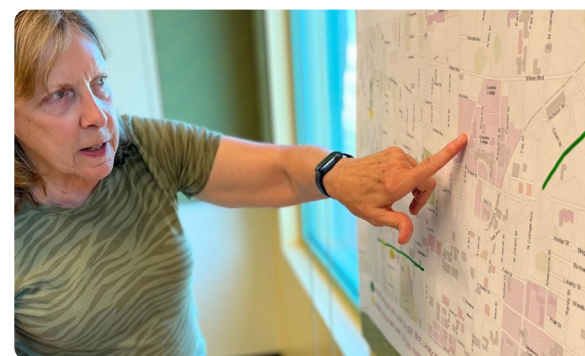


## Address Relevant Existing Policy and Procedure, History of the Issues, Alternatives, and Their Pros and Cons

Local Motion recently started a campaign, CoMo Livable Streets, asking the City Council to update Columbia’s street design standards – standards for what streets look like when they are updated, maintained, and built and which street projects are prioritized over others.

When we hosted community engagement meetings to rally support for and share information about the campaign, **we made sure to give people a distinct history of street design standards, why the policy was written the way it was, and what needs to change about the policy and why.**

We talked about the positives and negatives of certain street designs as well as the alternatives to the current street designs in Columbia. **This extensive history of how we got to where we are today was essential to people who weren’t familiar with the work that we do.** It told a story of why the CoMo Livable Streets existed instead of just telling people to agree with us and sign a petition about something they didn’t fully understand.



# Create a Transparent Process that Maximizes Trust and Community Building

Set aside volunteer, paid (if applicable in the project budget) positions, and leadership positions within the engagement process for people from a variety of backgrounds and experiences.

This could be people who show a high interest in the project, or who have, in the past, been leaders in their neighborhoods or communities.

Ask these volunteers or leaders to disseminate information throughout the community about project updates, outline a process for report backs and follow ups like a regular (i.e., monthly or bi-monthly) check-in meeting. **At these meetings, listen to what leaders are saying** about what their

communities want to know about the project updates, whether they need more information or engagement, and if there are still concerns or questions about the project.

**Working with leaders in the community helps promote transparency because people outside of your organization are working with you.** These community leaders have friends, loved ones, neighbors, and acquaintances in the community who trust them.





# Create a Transparent Process that Maximizes Trust and Community Building

We've talked extensively about Local Motion's Neighborhood Leader program and strategically involving them in all of our work and campaigns has been essential to creating equitable events, campaigns, and most importantly, community engagement.

**Meeting with those neighborhood leaders regularly is essential to creating transparent engagement with our leaders and their communities.**

These leaders are from all combinations of backgrounds and social identities: women, people of color, people with disabilities, people with multiple jobs, people of different economic statuses, and people who cannot get where they need to go using a vehicle.

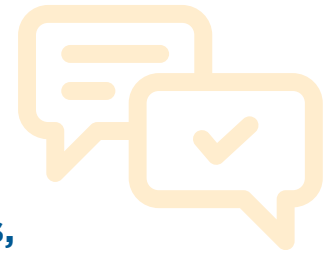
We have a group meeting every month and discuss updates to campaigns, what we need from them, and ask what they need from us. **If individuals cannot make it to this group meeting, we make sure to meet with them at another time that month at a time and place that is convenient.** These check-ins allow space for us to listen to each other, collaborate, and often spawn new ideas that our staff alone would not have thought of because of our different experiences.

# **4 Provide Closure**

**Engaging the community once and then never following up can lead to people, who have dedicated time and expertise, to feel used and unappreciated.**

Providing closure is essential to not only making folks feel heard and involved, but encourages them to continue participation into the future.

# Inform Affected Communities of All Outcomes of the Process and Continue to Cultivate Relationships



As you approach the end of your engagement process, make sure to share back successful or impactful input from any part of the engagement process to staff within your organization and with the people who participated.

How did the results meet, not meet, or alter your goals? **Consult within the organization but, more importantly, ask the community members involved how they felt with the engagement process.** How did they find out about meetings? Were the meetings held at convenient times? Should you have provided food, childcare, or any other services? Should you post more about meetings on social media or instead put out fliers for the meetings?

**Every engagement process has its flaws and it is important to build the process of time from past shortcomings.** Assign a staff member to document the details of the project's engagement process using the worksheet **Engagement Process Check-In**.

Let's say that your organization holds a series of public meetings over the course of six months. You have good conversations and input from the people who live in the area that would be affected by the project. **In the end, you decide that although their input is valid, the project has to go a different way.** Communicate your end result with the people who came to the public meetings. Let them know that their input was essential to the process. Report back to the entire community via the media channels you used previously in the engagement process, or that people said works well for them (e.g., newspaper

ads, neighborhood association newsletters, social media posts, fliers, radio spots).

**One of the big complaints about community engagement is that organizations come in, listen to people, and then the communication lines go quiet.** Report the ways that community input drove the final outcome of the project, and ways in which it did not. Emphasize that while the effects of community input might not be readily apparent, that does not mean participants' input was not taken into account before a final decision was made.



# Inform Affected Communities of All Outcomes of the Process and Continue to Cultivate Relationships

Local Motion hosted a grassroots campaign called [CoMo Livable Streets](#). We spent the entirety of the campaign implementing the Inclusive Community Engagement Toolkit.

Throughout this campaign, we made countless connections with individuals, organizations, and businesses. We connected with these groups to make sure our advocacy was well-informed by the most diverse experiences. **Almost more important than the end result of the campaign are those relationships we built and are continuing to build.**

**We know that continued relationships are important because simply using people to accomplish a goal does not establish trust or lay a solid foundation for future work.** Instead, we hope to maintain these relationships in a number of ways: meetings, collaboration on projects, new programs, and future community engagement.



Photo by Avery Abbott





**For example, we pay our Neighborhood Leaders a monthly stipend, but we don't want our relationships with them to be only about the work they do for us.**

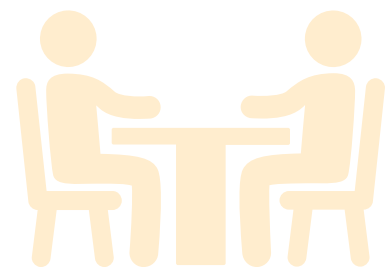
We regularly invite our Neighborhood Leaders and their friends or families to our celebrations and provide them with free tickets to paid events. **Additionally, we try to find ways to collaborate with other organizations that have worked with us on projects.** A local refugee charity in town gave their time and effort with the CoMo Livable Streets campaign and through that expressed their need for a public transportation orientation for recently settled refugees in town. We are now working to establish an ongoing education program with them. This is a perfect example of the beauty of continued relationships.

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**To maintain relationships with organizations, we try to set up at least one monthly meeting or check-in email to see how we can best collaborate throughout the year.**

That might be through an event that we or they are hosting, sharing a resource with them, or just meeting to talk about current or upcoming projects.

Meanwhile, we find that the best way to maintain relationships with a community group or individuals is through door knocking, hosting events in neighborhoods, and, if we have their contact information, sending them regular updates about our projects. **Door knocking and hosting neighborhood events at least a few times a year shows people that we want to continue our work with them,** and allows folks to get to know our organization without us asking anything of them in return.



# Conclusion

The Inclusive Community Engagement Toolkit is not a step-by-step set of instructions you follow until the last page and *voila!* you've solved all of the complexities and nuances of community engagement.

**It is a guide.** Some items in this guide might not be applicable to your organization, but the core values should be. **This type of engagement takes hard work, patience, trial and error, and time.** It's not meant to change the world overnight — it's meant to help you grow your organization and the way you make decisions to ensure that the people who are most affected by change have a say in that change. When people feel **empowered** to come to the table to share their voice, we create a community that was built by everyone - for everyone.



Photo by Jonathan Asher

**\*Please note:** Language is always evolving, and these definitions are currently what is known to be accurate and preferred. It is important to rely on and empower individuals and groups to self-identify and to use their preferred terms and phrases.

# Working\* Social Justice Glossary<sup>5</sup>

## Why do we use the term *working*?

Because, like this toolkit, these definitions are malleable and evolve over time when we continue learning about social change.

# Glossary

**Ability:** A social identity category referencing an individual's orientation to the world in relation to physical and mental functioning; including motor, speech, hearing, vision, cognitive, psychological, environmental, and medical; and the degree to which it conforms to societal norms and expectations.

**Age:** A social identity category referencing the number of years that an individual has lived, the resulting relative stage of development, and the perception of this through interactions with society.

**Ageism:** The system of oppression that enforces subordination and mistreatment of elders based on their age, through restrictions and denial of opportunities to exercise social, economic, and political power.

**Agent:** Individuals who belong to social identity groups that have ready access to resources that enhance one's chances of getting what one wants and influencing others. Those with social power and privilege.

**BIPOC:** BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous, and people of

color. Pronounced "bye-pock," this is a term specific to the United States, intended to center the experiences of Black and Indigenous groups and demonstrate solidarity between communities of color.

**Class:** A social identity category referencing social rank in terms of income, wealth, status, education, and power.

**Classism:** The system of oppression that assigns and enforces differential value to people according to their class in a social system characterized by economic inequality.

**Cultural Backgrounds:** The context of one's life experience as shaped by membership in groups based on ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, gender, exceptionalities, language, religion, sexual orientation, and geographical area.

**Diversity:** Having a variety of social identities represented in shared spaces, communities, institutions or society.

**Empowerment:** Social empowerment is the process of building the autonomy, power, confidence and other necessary

means to enact change and pave the way for a better future. Social empowerment takes place at both the individual and the collective level.

**Equality:** the state of being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities.

**Equity:** Equity is often conflated with the term "Equality" which means sameness and assumes, incorrectly, that everyone has had equal access, treatment, and outcomes. In fact, the need to work towards equity implies that an individual or group may need to experience or receive something different (not equal) in order to attain outcomes similar to privileged groups.

**Ethnicity:** A social identity category reflecting the sharing of characteristics such as culture, values, language, political/economic interests, history, nationality, and geographic ancestry.

**Gender:** A social identity category usually conflated with sex assigned at birth in a socially constructed binary system that presumes one to be either male/man/

masculine or female/woman/feminine. Gender is the complex interrelationship between sex assigned at birth, gender identity and gender expression.

**Inclusion:** The action or state of including, or of being included, in a group or structure. More than simply diversity and numerical representation, inclusion involves authentic and empowered participation and a true sense of belonging.

**Marginalization:** Marginalization defines what groups of people are useful to the system and which are considered marginal, dependent, and inferior. In marginalization, targeted groups are often subject to patronizing and punitive treatment, excluded from equal citizenship rights, and denied the right to privacy, respect, and individual choice.

**Oppression:** The one-way systemic mistreatment of a social identity group that is enforced by society and maintained by a network of institutional structures, policies and practices that create unearned benefits for the agent group, and discrimination and disadvantage for people in border and target groups. While all people have bias and prejudice, oppression creates systemic and institutional power

that goes beyond individual behaviors and beliefs.

**Privilege:** The unearned, often unquestioned and unconscious advantages, entitlements, benefits, choices, assumptions and expectations bestowed upon people based solely on their membership in the social group called the agent group.

**Race:** A social identity category based on the recent notion that groups people together according to common origin and perceived commonalities in physical characteristics (particularly skin color), often presumed incorrectly to be biologically meaningful.

**Racism:** The system of oppression that assigns and enforces differential value to people according to their race. A common definition: Racism = race prejudice + social and institutional power. Racism involves one group having the power to carry out systematic discrimination at the individual, institutional, and cultural/societal level.

**Social Identity:** A socially constructed characteristic, such as age, race, gender, class, etc., shared by a group of people which sets them apart from other groups.

**Social Power:** Access to resources that enhance one's chances of getting what one wants and influencing others.

**Target:** A group consisting of individuals who are denied access to resources that enhance one's chances of getting what one wants and influencing others because of their social identity. Those with less or without social power.

**Trusted Advocates:** Trusted Advocates lend credibility to the agencies they work for and ensure that the agency is getting accurate, representative, and high quality feedback from the target community. Members of a specific community who leads engagement of his/her community in a public process. The Trusted Advocates usually have deep connections to their communities as organizers and/or advocates.

# Citations

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4. "Living Wage Calculator." Living Wage Calculator - Living Wage Calculation for Boone County, Missouri, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2022, <https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/29019>.
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1. "Atlanta Community Engagement Playbook." City of Atlanta.
2. "APA Toolkiting for Equity Policy Guide." American Toolkiting Association, 2022.



Photo by Jonathan Asher



Photo by Jonathan Asher

# Appendix

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Engagement Process Check-In

Equity Assessment Worksheet

Example Community Engagement Budget

Example Community Engagement Project Plan

Example Community Engagement Timeline

Example Email for Reaching Out to a New Organization You'd Like to Work With

How to Host an Effective Meeting

Inclusive Focus Group Planning To-Do List

The Pre-Assessment

What are the costs of focus groups?

2023 Local Motion Community Survey