

Community Engagement: Strategies, Tools, and Lessons for the Pandemic and Beyond

Live webinar 04/21/20 at 1pm ET

Question and Answer Session

Attendee Question: So much of engagement in the time of COVID is digital. I'd love to hear your thoughts on engagement ideas that truly bridge the digital divide. I'm doing some community planning in Baltimore and we are struggling to figure out equitable strategies for large scale community engagement.

Michael Johnson: In many of the communities we are working in, we've acknowledged that more individuals have access to cell phones than wireless or broadband. It has become essential that we make sure our activities are mobile oriented. However, it is still not enough, as there still is almost 1/4 of our population that has neither. To get to those specific segments (typically also more rural and less educated), specifically in some of the projects we are working on in Detroit, it has been trying many different approaches to reach people, including phone surveys, mail surveys, even "workshop in a box" kits that are being mailed out and ways to return via mail or in person.

Ernest Wong: Of the numerous social service agencies that are currently doing outreach, the trust and engagement has already started. Perhaps there is a way to utilize those groups and their networks to accomplish the work that you're looking to do. You might have to barter your services for their participation, but that is one solution.

Attendee Question: It seems that many of these methods rely on digital resources. Are there any methods that wouldn't rely on a person having access to computer/smartphone?

Debra Guenther: Still using post cards and we are pairing that with self-guided walking tours. Using direct solicitation of BIPOC artists in neighborhood to create physically distant interactions.

Stephanie Grigsby: We have used self-guided walking tours. And have the option for people to mail in comments.

C.L. Bohannon: We have used walking tours as well, often organized by community leaders.

Ernest Wong: In the "old days", we used to communicate through letter writing and pamphlets. With people stuck at home, folks are more inclined to write their responses than "type". Get a bank or some other institution to donate pens, and go back to ancient and antiquated methods of communication.

Attendee Question: How can we offer equitable engagement in disadvantaged urban areas where digital inclusion and internet access is limited?

Stephanie Grigsby: Connecting to community leaders who best know how to reach out to people. Schools and social groups were one avenue previously. As well as doing block meetings and meeting where people are. That may come back, with more physical distancing. In the meantime, understanding how those local community groups are reaching these areas is a starting point to understanding how to engage. Then you can create a package of materials or what has been referred to as a meeting in the box to leverage community leaders as ambassadors.

Attendee Question: Online engagement procedure might exclude some levels of community, i.e. technology exclusion for elderly or a social class. Which tool can be considered in those cases?

Michael Johnson: Some of our local municipalities are making sure public meetings are streamed live not only online but also on public access television. And then engagement is done via telephone call-in. Not perfect, but certainly a little more equitable.

Stephanie Grigsby: PSAs through the local TV channel that lets them know where materials could be available. Connecting to their social groups is also helpful.

Attendee Question: I completely agree with your point about building and maintaining trust. What are some strategies that we can adapt during these times when we can't be face to face to establish trust, particularly in communities that are less technologically connected?

Michael Johnson: Agree with Deb and Ernie, working through existing groups and networks has proven to be effective to help build and maintain trust. Sometimes even important to build trust with a small group of "ambassadors" that are actually doing the engagement in their own neighborhoods with networks that have already been built across digital and in person modes. In some places, our key job has been to make sure these "ambassadors" have the tools and support needed.

Debra Guenther: Starting with groups that are doing work in the neighborhood already - how could partnering happen? There is a citizen science program in the neighborhood we are working in and we are working with them to share the project information through their existing program which potentially brings more volunteers to their work. Monitoring sites for water quality is a great solo/small group activity.

Ernest Wong: Building trust takes time. Through your networks, you can start to engage folks digitally, and start to have conversations now. Over time, the questions that need to be asked will be easier and more frank. Another suggestion to do outreach is to volunteer. Especially during this time of crisis. My brother works for a catering company in NYC that is delivering food to 1000 people every day. He definitely has PPE, and is meeting all kinds of people who are trusting him and the catering service to help them.

Attendee Question: How to deal with subsaspects of the digital divide for the phenomena that occur when a handful of verbal individuals take up response space and bias not just responses, but the cultural and interpersonal safety of others who may remain silent or self-censored as a result?

Michael Johnson: it is important to set ground rules at the beginning and try to keep each question focused. Acknowledge the challenges, but there are different venues to address these even in our current state via off-line conversations. We have also had some luck with time limits for each response to ensure more people can be heard. And emphasize that all engagement does not need to be synchronous and during the "public meeting window". Make sure there are multiple ways to provide input (web, call-in, write-in) beyond the meeting itself.

Debra Guenther: Spend time up front setting expectations for every meeting about sharing space and designating a moderator who will keep the conversation round robin. Debriefing at end of meeting to check-in with folks about how meeting was and how it could be better allows people to voice concerns or remind each other.

Stephanie Grigsby: Identify those risks as part of the planning. Using metrics to track who is participating, you can see if one group is dominating the conversation. That informs the decision making. Statistically valid surveys are another way. You can highlight groups who have had less of a voice through organized channels, but represent a significant part of the population.

Ernest Wong: In my role as a city commissioner, we have established a time rule, as well as rules of sticking to a particular subject matter. The difficulty is "policing" these rules. That being said, if these rules are clear and outlined prior to the engagement, most people will abide by them. I have also specifically called on folks who appear reluctant to speak for their opinion, not only recognizing their presence, but giving them the opportunity to speak. Remember the kid in class who never said anything? If he/she is specifically recognized, they'll sometimes speak.

Attendee Question: Do the panelists have any recommendations or experiences to share when engaging communities with differing abilities? I'm thinking of lack of closed captioning, reliance on visual materials, require internet availability, etc.).

Stephanie Grigsby: Accessibility requirements mean that all images should have captions that can have audio capability and video should now have closed captioning. We have connected with local access channels for local programming for more rural areas that may lack internet. We've used radio too and that connects people to how they can get involved through mail or phoning a project rep.

Attendee Question: In the current Co-Vid climate, people are anxious, how do the speakers feel this will or is impacting public consultation.

Michael Johnson: It is important that we acknowledge these challenges, meet people where they may be, but also ensure that our work is not seen as superficial, but rather really important to health, safety, welfare, resilience. Especially as this "temporary" crisis becomes much more of a new normal.

Ernest Wong: Folks are definitely feeling anxious. During this unprecedented time, it is definitely difficult to focus on anything else than social distancing, a cure or the economy. Acknowledging these fears and asking people if they're ready to tackle something different is not only empathetic, but allows for a much needed distraction.

Attendee Question: How do we conduct public workshops on line? Can we, as landscape architects, work toward developing ... public charrettes? Or focus groups online. I guess we need to work with municipalities to set up on line tools?? We need that public input for our design process. (Attendee from Vancouver)

Michael Johnson: I do think this is an important moment for private consultants to help lead our city partners. I've noticed that most firms are far more nimble and able to use multiple platforms than our municipalities.

Stephanie Grigsby: You can pose a webinar as an online workshop. Essentially presenting the material with opportunities for polling and the like. That could also tie to an online survey with mapping exercises that may be a little more interactive.

Ernest Wong: A lot of cities and municipalities are struggling with getting up to speed with the technology and resources that the private sector takes for granted. They'll eventually get there because they have to. You gotta wait and see what the opportunities are as the government agencies catch up. Your City Manager, Sadhu Johnston, is a very sharp guy. I think that Vancouver is ahead of the game.

Attendee Question: When preparing a community meeting during this time, whose responsibility is it to target outreach to the appropriate audience? Specifically with public agencies and their procedures for meetings, how can the landscape architect/designer reach out to the community without creating conflicts of interest in our projects?

Ernest Wong: We typically entrust our clients to provide lists and establish how outreach is going to occur. They typically want to do that themselves. Conflict of interest only occurs when you're talking off line with a particular individual/group about the specific subject matter that you're being paid to do. That doesn't mean that you can't engage and talk about other subject matters in order to promote trust. If you think you're having a conflict of interest, you probably are.

Attendee Question: What are the ethical ramifications of expecting a community to engage when they are suffering job loss or health issues? How do you kick off a community engagement process during covid and not come across as tone deaf?

Michael Johnson: I think it is important to follow the lead of our particular communities and community leaders. It may be best for some to postpone, but it may also be okay and imperative that we continue our important work as long as we acknowledge everybody's unique challenges, meet people where they may be, but also ensure that our work is not seen as superficial, but rather really important to health, safety, welfare, resilience. Especially as this "temporary" crisis becomes much more of a new normal.

Stephanie Grigsby: There needs to be respect for the community and what it is going through. In some instances, it may be appropriate to pause and maybe even refocus the project efforts to help address the issue at hand in some way. Even by using the outreach platform for a different purpose. In other communities, there may be a sense that residents are interested in connecting virtually, and the outreach offers an opportunity to engage them in thinking forward.

Attendee Question: How do we frame questions differently now as our communities will be experiencing public space differently now?

Michael Johnson: The last several weeks have certainly opened up many of our minds as to what is possible. And the more and more aspects of social distancing and working from home become a new normal, it provides really exciting ways to think about adaptively re-using public realm space in our cities to improve health.

C.L. Bohannon: I think by continuing to question in what ways we use public space? This has to be a continual process to meet the needs of society

Ernest Wong: That's the million dollar question. Because we actually don't know what public space is going to look like in the near future, the same question you're asking yourself can be asked of others.

Attendee Question: Sometimes, when we are focusing on community engagement inclusive targets but the community has the concern about Covid-19 that dominates the project. How can we encourage the community to engage fully?

Stephanie Grigsby: We have reserved the first part of meetings (small and large) to acknowledge the current state. Connect with where we are and then recognize by giving value to how we are feeling, we have the space and capacity to engage in the conversation. Similar to when a person is personally worried or anxious, mindfulness means first bringing attention to those feelings and then allowing ourselves the grace to shift our thoughts, even if it is for a moment.

Attendee Question: Has anyone experienced downsides of utilizing virtually technologies such as trolling or anonymous anger or zoom-bombing?

Michael Johnson: There was a great New York Times article about preventing Zoom bombing. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/07/style/zoom-security-tips.html> also, our local municipalities are using Zoom with call-in only options for council meetings, essentially providing a second room to pre-screen callers before letting them into the public meeting.

Stephanie Grigsby: We have set up Zoom meetings with passwords. And webinars have the options to control cameras, and to monitor the chat box and comment log.

Attendee Question: How do you envision re-structuring of fees for utilization of these various online platforms - whereas there was previously just one format planned. - Side note - we have

noticed in recent projects that online engagement receives nearly 10x the amount of participants to in-person engagement - potentially due to a paradigm shift?

Stephanie Grigsby: For projects that are in their final stages, we will likely incur or have to absorb the cost as we shift platforms. For other projects, we are trying to look at cost equivalents and having those discussions with the client. In some instances it could be less travel time that helps to balance the extra time for setup and for platform fees.

Ernest Wong: I'm not sure that fees are any different when 10 people engage, than when 100 people engage. You're asking the same questions, getting the same results. Perhaps the time in sorting through the results can merit fee increases, but this certainly up to your leadership.

Attendee Question: There will be a rush to build, do 'shovel-ready' projects. If we are to have real engagement and involvement, and 'move at the speed of trust' for planning and design, how do you reframe the politics and economics that will demand the need to 'build' for economic purposes?

Michael Johnson: I think trust and transparency will be key here, both for our clients and for the communities that we represent. No doubt there will be pressure to get our economies going from many different angles. Regardless of project it will be important to frame the benefits of projects in bottom line metrics of health, resilience and of course \$

Ernest Wong: Time is money, right? Re-establishing expectations will be the key moving forward. If you're transparent about the speed of making decisions, you've laid it out there.

Attendee Question: How do you identify barriers without making assumptions?

Stephanie Grigsby: You ask. Ask about other processes, what has worked, what hasn't, who has been involved and who needs to be involved that hasn't. That's the first step, and then ask people closer that can give insights.

C.L. Bohannon: Be upfront and ask.

Ernest Wong: On a personal note, whenever I assume anything, I'll ask the question point blank. Like, "did you walk the dog?" I would assume so, but I gotta ask the question to avoid cleaning up a mess.

Attendee Question: Can the panel speak to the use of social media data mining techniques such as georeferenced sentiment analysis to gauge public perspectives on a variety of topics from project specific concerns to general feelings about things affecting their communities such as COVID-19? Is there a value to capturing the 'raw' group sentiment outside of the filter of actively asking for responses to questions?

Michael Johnson: Good question! I absolutely think raw data mining outside of projects will be important to better understand what our communities are going through. Definitely removes the bias, especially if municipality-led. And interesting to track patterns over time too.

Stephanie Grigsby: We have used a review of social media to look at trends in conversations and look at local news for topics that are of strong interest. It helps to get a big picture view. Recognize that each social media platform has a different demographic and that some are more prone toward negativity.

Attendee Question: Ernest mentioned "Authenticity" and the question of what is real. What are your thoughts on the current climate crisis, health crisis, and inequality crisis being components of a greater "Authenticity Crisis"?

Ernest Wong: Authenticity and reality are two different things. We can all be "authentic" about how we feel about any subject matter, but that's only our perception about what is real. So taking into account what people's perceptions are about a particular subject matter, and actually listening takes skill and empathy.

Attendee Question: Question for Debra: you mentioned working with an artist on a public art project. How has the artist's engagement skills complimented the design team?

Debra Guenther: Great question. This artist is focused on creative placemaking integrated with the community engagement process to support multiple ways of community expression led by Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) artists who are interested in community driven projects. This creates a flow of community interests and priorities for the design team to reflect and creates stewardship and personal investment in place by residents that are engaged in the experience of creating art or performance.

Attendee Question: How do yall think we should go about encouraging things that are beneficial to society or environment like public transportation or compact development to limit sprawl in the wake of this?

Stephanie Grigsby: I was listening to a Freakonomics podcast with Ed Glaeser as a guest. He has written a lot about the benefits of urbanization to society. One thing he said that struck me was that even though cities are feeling some of the biggest impacts right now, the benefits of city infrastructure is still there. Rural infrastructure is much more likely to be easily overwhelmed

Ernest Wong: Public transportation is one of the things that I worry most about with this pandemic. I don't know the answer but speculate that it'll be more expensive. :(

Attendee Question: Thanks so much LAF for the wonderful panel. I'm wondering if the group thinks it's premature to also be thinking differently about how the physical spaces we're designing might change, and the implications on these various communities, in the long term? For example, separating or zoning spaces by age group. Thank you!

Stephanie Grigsby: As designers, it's hard to keep us from not thinking about how things could or should change. It seems that we should also weigh the pros/cons of many other factors along with potential design changes.

Attendee Question: So good to see you all here today - thank you. My question: how do the tools of community engagement during this time actually change the way we design in landscape architecture? Is there a lasting impact? Can we actually "read" the changes in our designs by disruption and extraction (to use C.L.'s word)?

Ernest Wong: Thanks for joining us. I definitely think that how people use public space going forward will impact how we design. The public engagement will have to wait to get the results of our own social behavior.

Attendee Question: Indigenous peoples -- in many diversities -- are completely invisible. In community engagement, in trusting local relations, and on panels. In the USA especially but still in Canada too. Inclusivity still forgets. How can we lead land-based humanity and right relations in "all directions"? :-)

Debra Guenther: Thanks for raising this. I appreciate that Canada requires a land acknowledgement at all public events. I hope the US will pick up on this and in the meantime we can all choose to start our meetings that way. Another way that bears repeating is to create space at public meetings for the "invisible stories" about place that are difficult to share. Repeating opportunities to share difficult stories makes it apparent they are truly wanted and invited..... that people are willing to be uncomfortable.

Ernest Wong: Indigenous people all over the world have been marginalized and left out of the conversation about nearly everything. Canada is much more forgiving (or at least acknowledges) this issue more than the US. There has, however, some progress with the first indigenous Congresswoman being elected to the House. It's a start, but voting and unfortunately, wealth will start to change that narrative.

Attendee Question: Some of the most commonly used tools mentioned have also been known for creating social echo chambers and blind spots. How do you ensure that you are bringing diverse opinions to the table without having the appearance of "playing favorites"?

Stephanie Grigsby: Try a layered approach and identify where the input is not reflective of the community demographic/makeup. Most communities recognize who the vocal minority has been and the outreach plan can be crafted to seek out a more balanced voice.

Attendee Question: To Ernest Wong's point, when we talk about marginalized communities, we need to keep in mind that many of these communities haven't been participated before because of issues, such as language barriers, or lack of time and resources to attend in-person meetings. As Pew Research Institute study shows many of these communities in the US do have access to broadband internet and smartphones and maybe willing to participate more by using digital platforms. In particular, because participating via these platforms don't necessarily need language skills. They can just take a picture with their phones and share what they want on social media instead of talking about the issue in a meeting which is very demanding for ESL people.

Ernest Wong: I really appreciate this comment. The Pew study shows that immigrants and ESL groups are the least likely to participate in public engagement. The language barrier intimidates individuals along with the mindset that their voices won't be heard anyway. Additionally, public meetings are held when folks are working two or three jobs, don't have childcare, or transportation. Social media platforms definitely help. In the Chinese community, everyone uses WeChat, which really has empowered this particular demographic to participate more.

Attendee Question: How are you being sensitive to shifting priorities (health / finances) when asking for community member's time?

Michael Johnson: As was stated, reimburse people for their time! Build it into the project.

Stephanie Grigsby: Increasing the time frame for involvement and the options. Keep input formats concise and easy to understand and use.

Attendee Question: Are people using physical passive installations to engage about space?

Michael Johnson: We have also been using these passive art installations as Wi-Fi hotspots in Detroit. Double benefit!

Debra Guenther: This is a great opportunity we have talked about exploring - scavenger hunts or posters - also the creative placemaking by BIPOC artists I mentioned above will explore this.

Attendee Question: I would like to suggest to discuss/teach some research methods for conducting studying landscape architecture and pandemic situation. I am working in a university in China and I would like to conduct a research in this area. But I am not sure about research methods. Thank you

Michael Johnson: LAF is a great platform for this! Let's discuss more!

Ernest Wong: Perhaps a methodology using WeChat or Alibaba platforms can help.

LAF note: Keep an eye out for our upcoming August CSI 2020 webinar to learn about how our research teams conducted their *Case Study Investigation* work in the COVID-19 context!

Attendee Question: Michael touched on virtual white boarding. Can you elaborate on this a bit more?

Michael Johnson: We've tested: Miro, Mural, Conceptboard, AWW, Stormboard. All pretty similar and none offer much more feature or function wise than Mural – and Mural has the added benefit of various tools for break-out rooms and collaboration. We've also played around with Google Drawings – which is pretty nice and easy to use as well, but more for collaborative drawing instead. You don't get the full functionality of these programs until you pay the monthly user fee – which is \$17/month for Mural. I don't know if the drawing tool options are better in Stormboard – but it does allow for more than a PDF or image export of your boards/murals. It has full office suite functionality, so you can export to Word, PowerPoint, Excel. This is very

appealing to Workplace, which is looking for a more streamlined way to generate notes/results from their workplace strategy workshops. However – Stormboard may be “view only” for external users who don’t have a license – so if this is the case it won’t work for public engagement. Mural’s own publication re: using it for workshops recommends a max of 24 participants per workshop – so I think it’s safe to say they didn’t envision it being used for large public forums.

Attendee Question: Is anyone using web app Conceptboard to communicate design ideas and deliverables?

Michael Johnson: (See above)

Stephanie Grigsby: I have not used it, but am interested in checking it out.

Attendee Question: Will it be possible for the speakers to share examples of their work? (smart phone videos, interactive websites, etc)

Stephanie Grigsby: We can add a link to a sample project in a few weeks. The project manager requested that we not share it widely since public input is in progress and clicking through the survey could skew results. A map of the project is on a landing page with areas you can hover and learn more about individual components. A qualtrics survey is then included with links to videos and imagery for additional information for people as they respond to survey questions.

Ernest Wong: Our website at www.site-design.com has some of our work on video.

Attendee Question: Can you share example interactive websites that show this integration of survey questions and narrative?

Michael Johnson: Here is one we are working on right now for the city of Ann Arbor around housing and affordability: Link to Survey: <https://www.surveygizmo.com/collab/5333757/Ann-Arbor-Housing-Affordability><https://www.surveygizmo.com/collab/5333757/Ann-Arbor-Housing-Affordability>

Link to website: <https://www.community-engagement-annarbor.com/>

Stephanie Grigsby: We have used Qualtrics as a survey platform and had links within the survey that took you to a vimeo or youtube clip which provides more information. Qualtrics and SurveyGizmo also have a few more options for interactive mapping questions. MySidewalk and OpenTownHall have services that can be used and they will also actively monitor and engage with the more "crowdsourcing" type of input being received. MetroQuest is another survey platform that has more graphic tools for survey engagement. Before spending too much budget on a fancy platform, though, simple video links in your surveymonkey questions could work. Develop a slideshow and record yourself narrating ovetop of it. Or of a zoomed in section of your plan. Post that to Vimeo and you can link to it in your survey. Lowtech can also get the job done.

Ernest Wong: We explored the following platforms: Public Input.com, Placespeak, Engagement HQ and Social Pinpoint.

Attendee Comment: We have invented "meeting in a box" to enable local community leaders to reach out and gain input. We are helping them host Zoom meetings and equipping them with presentation and input materials. Also created online response system.

Michael Johnson: Cool! Please share!

Stephanie Grigsby: Great ideas!

C.L. Bohannon: This is a great idea, do you have a website or way for others to use/modify?

Attendee Comment: A final suggestion: a huge part of inclusivity and leadership needs us to develop the skills of recognizing and working with triggers during hot-topic conversations about Land and community relationships. Our society doesn't support us to learn how to honour triggers in socially and psychologically safe ways. All the great ideas, science, and cultural wisdom cannot move forward without collective social skills.

Stephanie Grigsby: This is an excellent point - we are not prepared to recognize, acknowledge, sit with triggers....cultural competency is an urgent need and is life-long learning...

Attendee Comment: Well said Deb and C.L.!!! DISRUPTIVE ENGAGEMENT and slow the heck down. Racism is not going to be fixed by a social media post!

Debra Guenther: *snaps*

Attendee Comment: AMEN ERNEST WONG!!!! <3

Ernest Wong: Thanks for joining us. Really appreciate it. :) Stay safe and healthy.