

Engaging communities: a primer for landscape architecture practice

by

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A REPORT

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Abstract

Recent calls for more democratic design and equitable outcomes have led to a shift within landscape architecture practice towards more meaningful community engagement processes that (1) move beyond conventional, “check-the-box” models, (2) are integrated throughout planning and design processes, and (3) are practiced as an in-house service within landscape architecture firms. Meaningful community engagement processes seek to invite communities into shared dialogue and collaboration to ultimately shape more responsive and relevant planning and design outcomes. As community engagement becomes an increasingly valuable and necessary part of landscape architecture practice, landscape architecture students and emerging professionals could benefit from a “behind the scenes” look at community engagement process—all the thought processes, nuances, important considerations, and detailed decisions that go into a community engagement process. This project aims to build an understanding of how landscape architects develop and implement community engagement processes as a service *within* their practice. Though there are numerous guides written from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds about how to define, plan, and implement engagement, few are written from a landscape architecture perspective. At the same time, there is a small subset of landscape architecture professionals who have either built a practice around community engagement or have extensive experience leading engagement projects at their firms. Through document analysis of existing community engagement guides and in-depth interviews with experienced landscape architecture professionals, this report connects the dots between what is published in existing guides and what is being practiced in the field. The findings informed a primer on community engagement that includes important considerations for developing engagement processes within landscape architecture practice. The primer is intended to be a resource for landscape architecture students and emerging professionals who not only recognize the importance of community engagement but hope to bring some of this knowledge to their future workplaces.

Engaging Communities: A Primer for Landscape Architecture Practice

A Landscape Architecture
Master's Project & Report

Emily Siler
Kansas State University 2023

Acknowledgments

This project started as messy thoughts scribbled on newsprint and scrap pieces of paper I saved from the recycling bin. It would not be where it is today without the guidance and support from my major professor Jessica Canfield—thank you for your encouragement and patience.

To my committee members, La Barbara James Wigfall and Dr. Brandon Kliewer—thank you for broadening and deepening my understanding of engagement.

And to those who supported this project through engaging in early conversations and participating in interviews—thank you for your willingness and eagerness to share your community engagement process and practice with me. Your insights are an invaluable piece of this project and an incredible learning opportunity for landscape architecture students and emerging professionals.

“twenty-first century
practice requires *new* ways
of thinking about design
process, including notions
of coalition building and
co-creation”

—Gina Ford in *250 Things a Landscape
Architect Should Know*

(Ford 2021, 61)

ABSTRACT

Recent calls for more democratic design and equitable outcomes have led to a shift within landscape architecture practice towards more meaningful community engagement processes that (1) move beyond conventional, “check-the-box” models, (2) are integrated throughout planning and design processes, and (3) are practiced as an in-house service within landscape architecture firms. Meaningful community engagement processes seek to invite communities into shared dialogue and collaboration to ultimately shape more responsive and relevant planning and design outcomes. As community engagement becomes an increasingly valuable and necessary part of landscape architecture practice, landscape architecture students and emerging professionals could benefit from a “behind the scenes” look at community engagement process—all the thought processes, nuances, important considerations, and detailed decisions that go into a community engagement process. This project aims to build an understanding of how landscape architects develop and implement community engagement processes as a service *within* their practice. Though there are numerous guides written from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds about how to define, plan, and implement engagement, few are written from a landscape architecture perspective. At the same time, there is a small subset of landscape architecture professionals who have either built a practice around community engagement or have extensive experience leading engagement projects at their firms. Through document analysis of existing community engagement guides and in-depth interviews with experienced landscape architecture practitioners, this report connects the dots between what is published in existing guides and what is being practiced in the field. The findings informed a primer on community engagement that includes important considerations for developing engagement processes within landscape architecture practice. The primer is intended to be a resource for landscape architecture students and emerging professionals who not only recognize the importance of community engagement but hope to bring some of this knowledge to their future workplaces.

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Glossary

Community

“A community is any group of people who share common characteristics such as, but not limited to, location, age, race, ethnicity, ability, shared experiences, interests or other commonalities” (NRPA 2019, 3).

Community Engagement

Encompasses a variety of collaborative activities that meaningfully involve communities in problem-solving or decision-making processes pertaining to plans and designs that shape the physical, built environment

Participatory Design

“Participatory design is an approach to actively involve all stakeholders in the design process in order to design to the needs or desires of those involved” (Student’s Guide to EJ, 17).

Access

The ability to “fully participate in the engagement space and processes” (Beyond Inclusion, 7).

Equity

“Equity in public engagement exists when resources and opportunities for participation are distributed in a manner that responds to historic and ongoing disadvantages faced by marginalized groups. Equitable public engagement provides mutually beneficial opportunities for people to contribute and is mindful of power and privilege within engagement processes, institutions and broader systems” (Beyond Inclusion, 7).

Community Capacity

“the ability of stakeholders and communities to engage with one another to participate in a decision process” (EPA 2011, 94) and the ability of communities to be effective leaders and collaborative problem-solvers.

Facilitator

The individual or group who is leading community engagement activities, sessions and events... The facilitator provides assistance by helping the parties set ground rules for these discussions, promoting effective communication, eliciting creative options, and keeping the group focused and on track. ” (EPA 2011, 94-95).

Introduction

A Broad Picture of Engagement

Situating Engagement within Planning & Design

The Shift Towards Meaningful Engagement

Why Engage?

Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice

Research Question

Project Goals

Overview of Report

to en·gage

1. to occupy the attention or efforts
2. to interest or engross
3. to involve or participate
4. to come together, entangle, or interlock

(Oxford Languages Dictionary; Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

A Broad Picture of Engagement

The field of engagement encompasses a broad range of disciplines—including public policy, anthropology, communications, education, economic development, planning, and design—each with their own perceptions and practices of engagement (Leighninger 2014).

The language used to define engagement is equally broad—from words such as outreach and deliberation to participation, co-creation, and empowerment (Arnstein 1969; IAP2 n.d.; Leighninger 2014; Nursey-Bray 2020). Though a single, concise, and widely accepted definition remains elusive, there is a common understanding that engagement represents an essential aspect of democracy: **people impacting decisions that impact them** (Arnstein 1969; IAP2 n.d.; Day 1997; Neuman 1999; Leighninger 2014; Gaber 2019; Nursery Bray 2020).

Broadly, engagement is a process that gives people voice, agency, and power allowing them to participate in democratic problem-solving and decision-making. Community engagement involves a series of methods and tools that enable communities to provide input and involvement that can directly impact the outcomes of decisions. Engagement recognizes the value of local knowledge and lived experience to address complex issues such as workforce development, rural health initiatives, urban vacancy, or the climate crisis.

“The need for engagement has been partly driven by the fact that as societies and communities we face problems of great complexity” (Nursey-Bray 2020).

Situating Engagement within Planning & Design

In landscape architecture practice, engagement provides opportunities for communities to directly impact planning and design decisions that ultimately shape physical and sociocultural landscapes.

The intersection of social movements in the 1960s led to several significant urban planning policy developments, many of which required some level of public participation and engagement. However, these policies resulted in confusion on how participation and engagement should be applied in practice. Moreover, these mandates were often boiled down to conventional engagement techniques—the presentation-heavy public meetings, three-minute intervals at an open microphone, and 30-day public comment periods—that were seen more as a box to check and less as true opportunities for democratic decision-making. Superficial at best and detrimental at worst, these conventional engagement practices often fall short of democratizing the structures of public problem-solving and decision-making processes (Pateman 2012; Nabatchi & Leighninger 2015, 23; Leighninger 2014, 3).

The Shift Towards Meaningful Engagement

More recently within landscape architecture practice, there has been a heightened interest and need for democratic planning and design processes as well as equitable planning and design outcomes. Both the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic and racial justice movements raised questions about who has access to and who shapes public space (LAM 2020). These contemporary issues spurred landscape architects to rethink and reevaluate how community engagement can play a role in their design processes.

Though engagement in landscape architecture practice isn't a new concept, often being required on public projects by legal mandates, the way that landscape architects approach and practice community engagement is changing. Calls for more democratic design and equitable outcomes coupled with a recognized need for more transparency, openness, and collaboration in the design process, has led to a shift in landscape architecture practice towards more meaningful engagement processes. This shift can be characterized by community engagement processes that:

- move beyond conventional, “check-the-box” models,
- are integrated throughout planning and design processes,
- and are practiced as an in-house service within landscape architecture firms.

THE SHIFT TOWARDS MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

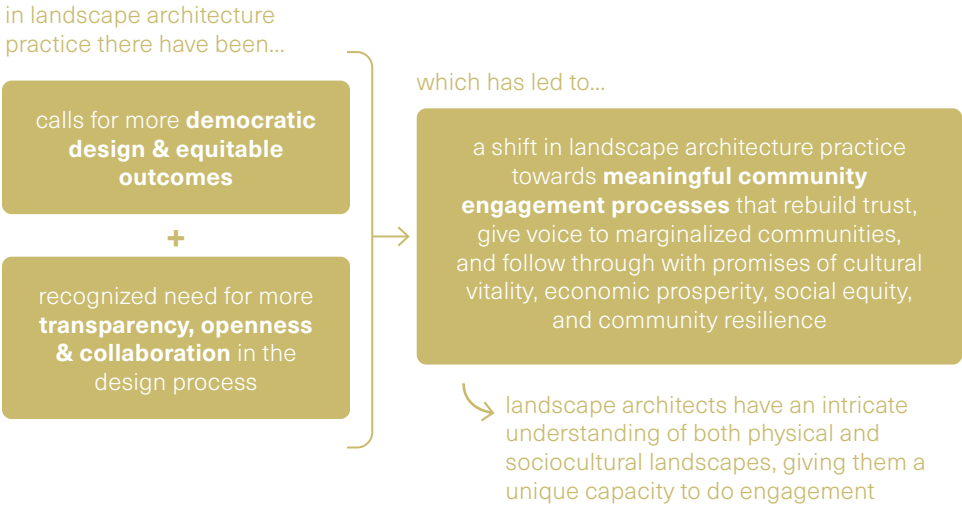


Figure 1.1 The Shift Towards Meaningful Engagement (Siler 2023)

Though more and more landscape architecture firms are integrating community engagement as a core service within their practice, some firms remain slower to embrace this work for a variety of reasons. Some landscape architects may be hesitant to “give into” community input, fearing they would have to sacrifice design excellence to make room for community ideas (Day 1997; de la Peña *et al.* 2017, 5). Others may feel that engagement is outside the realm of landscape architecture practice; that it should be outsourced to the growing field of engagement professionals. Still others, while they may have a desire or interest in doing engagement, don't have the internal resources to do it. Therefore, they must rely on external consultants to lead community engagement work.

Why Engage?

Community engagement can be mutually beneficial for both landscape architects and communities. Authentic and meaningful engagement has the potential to result in better plans, stronger designs, and more resilient communities.



Plans & Designs:

- are more innovative (Nabatchi & Leighninger 2015, 35)
- are more responsive and reflective of communities
- are seen as “more legitimate and are less subject to challenge” (EPA 2011, 4)
- are seen as assets by the community (Mullenbach *et al.* 2019)
- are “more implementable and sustainable” (EPA 2011, 4).

Communities:

- become informed and aware of current issues and opportunities
- engage in conversations that promote understanding and acceptance
- build relationships and grow social networks (Lasker & Weiss 2003)
- find connections to “resources and allies they need to implement their ideas” (Nabatchi & Leighninger 2015, 35)
- develop leadership and problem-solving capacity (Nabatchi & Leighninger 2015, 35)
- are able to better address difficult social problems (EPA 2011, 4).
- gain a sense of agency, efficacy and self-confidence (Fernandez 2018)

Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice

While there are numerous models and guides, published from a range of disciplines, about how to define, plan, develop, and implement community engagement, few are written through a landscape architecture lens. The lack of landscape architecture-specific engagement guides leaves gaps in knowledge about engagement theory and practice. Without discipline-specific resources about community engagement, it is difficult for landscape architecture students and emerging professionals with limited field experience to learn how to effectively conduct engagement.

At the same time however, there is a growing number of landscape architects practicing engagement as a core service within their firms. These practitioners have unique insights and learned experience that fills in the gaps on the “behind the scenes” aspects of community engagement in landscape architecture practice. Practitioners' insights include key takeaways and lessons-learned that are difficult to glean from existing published guides and limited experience in practice.

The outcomes of community engagement in landscape architecture practice, whether a plan or a built work, often present a polished picture of engagement processes. But the behind the scenes efforts, the thought processes, detailed decisions, important considerations, and the labor of love that goes into planning and implementing engagement processes is what makes community engagement interesting to study and an incredible learning opportunity. During the initial research for this project, four phases of the engagement process were identified: **discover, plan, engage, and respond**. The term phases is used loosely—not to define hard and fast intervals throughout the engagement process (in reality, they’re fluid and overlap), but rather to provide some basic structure. Shown in Figure 1.2, these phases represent the iterative and cyclical process leading up to engagement outcomes.

The discovery phase involves building relationships and getting to know the community. Understanding the contextual factors that impact the community helps frame the values, goals, and objectives that guide the rest of the engagement process. The planning phase involves more procedural aspects of engagement such as working with clients, drafting project proposals, scoping engagement, and developing a contract. The next phase, engage, represents an

THE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

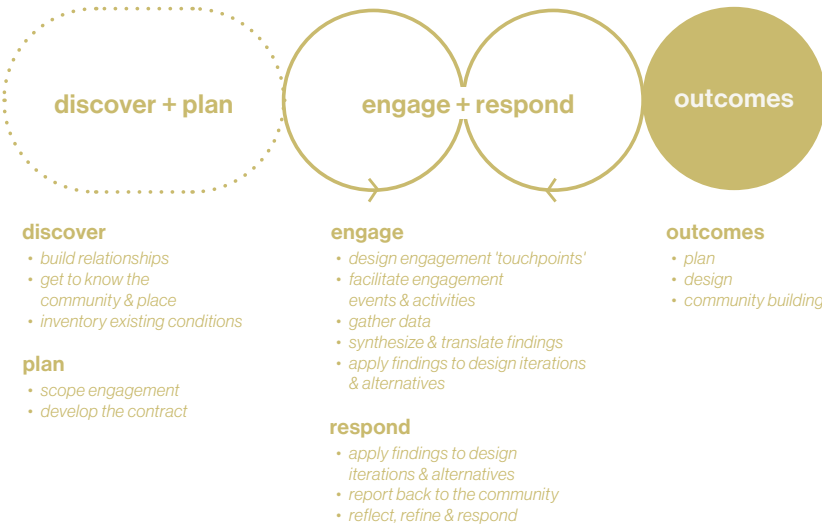


Figure 1.2 The Engagement Process (Siler 2023)

iterative process of designing unique engagement touchpoints and facilitating engagement events and activities that allow community members to inform or influence project outcomes. Community engagement findings are then synthesized and translated to planning and design ideas. The fourth phase, respond, represents an essential feedback loop that maintains transparent communication about how community input shaped planning and design ideas. These four phases of the community engagement process set up a framework that guided the outcomes of this project.

The lack of a broad understanding on how community engagement is practiced by landscape architects, specifically how to develop and implement meaningful and equitable engagement processes, limits the potential for others to replicate and adapt these processes. The more landscape architecture students and emerging professionals who value community engagement and have the knowledge and skills to plan and facilitate it, the more widespread its benefits can be.

In light of the need to better understand the processes of developing and implementing community engagement, this project seeks to answer:

RESEARCH QUESTION:

What should landscape architecture students and emerging professionals know about developing and implementing community engagement within landscape architecture practice?

SUB-QUESTION:

How are landscape architects developing and implementing community engagement processes as a core service within their practice?

Project Goals

This project seeks to learn how landscape architects develop and implement community engagement processes.

- Review and analyze foundational engagement guides that are relevant to planning and design fields to provide a base understanding of proposed engagement processes
- Interview landscape architects and planners who have experience with community engagement to provide an in-depth look at how engagement processes are applied in landscape architecture practice
- Create a primer that can be used as a resource for landscape architecture students and emerging professionals who recognize the importance of community engagement and hope to plan and implement community engagement processes at their workplaces

This project builds on existing guidelines and best-practices from literature and most importantly, includes lessons learned and insights from practitioners to inform the creation of a primer for students and emerging professionals. The resulting primer intends to bring awareness to the “behind the scenes” of engagement in landscape architecture practice.

Overview of Report

This report is organized into seven chapters: Introduction, Background, Methodology, Document Analysis Findings, Interview Findings, Primer on Community Engagement, and Conclusions. The Background chapter reviews literature on the history of engagement, common models for defining and categorizing engagement, and the benefits and challenges of engagement. The Methodology and Findings chapters further build on literature through a deeper analysis of existing engagement guides and interviews with landscape architect practitioners. *Engaging Communities: A Primer for Landscape Architecture Practice* brings together the recommendations from literature and takeaways from practitioners to provide a resource for landscape architecture students and emerging professionals. The primer is written through the lens of landscape architecture practice and discusses important considerations for developing and implementing community engagement. The final chapter, Conclusions, reflects on project limitations and suggestions for further research.

Background

Defining Engagement

An “Essentially Contested Concept”

Writing Engagement into Policy

Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

Thick, Thin & Conventional Participation

Barriers to Engagement

Connecting Engagement and Landscape Architecture

History of Engagement in Landscape Architecture Practice

The Evolution of Engagement in Planning & Design: A Timeline

Now More Than Ever

A Landscape Architecture Definition

A Definition of Engagement for This Project

Techniques & Tools

Defining Engagement

Throughout its history, engagement has been woven into various theories, diagrammed along numerous continuums, written into several policies, and practiced under many different names. The evolution of engagement reveals a few things: one, engagement is dynamic. It is contextual and constantly responding to communities and wider political and sociocultural climates. Two, engagement's dynamic nature makes it hard to define.

An “Essentially Contested Topic”

Using a term coined by philosopher W. B. Gallie, Diane Day describes citizen participation as an “essentially contested concept,” a concept that has a variety of meanings, interpretations, and applications (1997, 423).

There are a multitude of perceptions of not only what engagement is, but what to call it (Arnstein 1969; Day 1997; Neuman 1999; Leighninger 2014; Gaber 2019; Nursey-Bray 2020). Various terms—citizen participation, public participation, public engagement, community engagement—are often used interchangeably throughout literature and within the field of engagement leaving many wondering, do these terms simply represent nominal differences in connotation? Or do they represent true differences in how engagement is applied and practiced?

This confusion is “more than just a language problem” writes Matt Leighninger (2014, 1). “The real issue is that while [those in the field of engagement] may all agree that [their work] relates somehow to democracy, [they] have not established – or, at least, [they] have not articulated – a common vision of what that really means” (2014, 1). Across the broad range of disciplines that practice engagement, there is a shared understanding that engagement represents an essential aspect of democracy: **people impacting decisions that impact them** (Arnstein 1969; Day 1997; Pateman 2012; Leighninger 2014). However, the confusion within the language used to define engagement stems from differing philosophical and political views on influence, power, and democracy (Day 1997; Pateman 2012; Leighninger 2014). How much influence *should* people have in decision-making processes? How much power *can* people have in impacting the outcomes of decisions? These questions exemplify the diverging interpretations of participation and engagement, which have implications for how engagement materializes in practice. Some engagement approaches, processes, and

methods may operate under limited views of power and influence. Participation alone doesn't equate to influence on the outcomes. In other words, just because people are involved in decision-making processes, doesn't necessarily mean that they have power to influence the outcome of those decisions (Day 1997). Other engagement approaches, processes, and methods may strive to share power and increase the influence people have on decisions.

Writing Engagement into Policy

The challenge to define participation and engagement was underscored during the social and political movements of the mid-twentieth century. It was at this time that public participation was written into policy—an attempt to formalize participation that only revealed the difficulty in clearly defining what it was.

Federal Housing Acts of 1949 & 1954

Some of the first traces of mandated public participation are found in the Urban Renewal program established by the Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954 (Day 1997, 423). The urban renewal program provided federal funding to cities “for [the] rehabilitation and conservation of blighted and deteriorating areas” (HUD 2014; Johnstone 1958). To be eligible for federal funds (i.e. loans or grants) cities were required to develop a “workable program for urban renewal” (HUD 2014). In other words, cities had to organize a group that demonstrated efforts towards improving urban conditions. According to *How Localities Can Develop a Workable Program for Urban Renewal* these “workable programs” required “full-fledged citizen participation:”

“The community must guarantee that full citizen participation will begin at the time planning of the program is initiated and will include representatives of businesses, professional, labor, welfare, religious, educational and minority group interests in both the community as a whole and in slum and blighted areas” (McGraw 1955, 173).

For many cities, this resulted in a small advisory board composed of local civic leaders, business owners, and developers—local power elites who “increasingly saw “slums” and “blight” as threats to their livelihoods” (Planetizen n.d.). Many of the urban renewal programs that these advisory committees initiated resulted in “slum clearance” and displacement through eminent domain, often targeting low-income communities of color (Planetizen n.d.; Pfau, Hochfelder and Sewell

n.d.). The “full-fledged citizen participation” in urban renewal programs however, was more used as a tactic to garner cooperation than to share decision-making power.

Economic Opportunity Act

Passed in 1964 by president Lyndon B. Johnson, the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) established the Community Action Program, a federally funded program intended to fight poverty on the local level (“Office of Economic Opportunity” n.d.). Similar to the Urban Renewal Program, the Community Action Program provided federal funds to support initiatives carried out by local organizations called Community Action Agencies. The act required “maximum feasible participation of the residents of the areas and members of the groups served,” namely low-income minority communities (Day 1997, 423). The “maximum feasible participation” in community action programs was contested and debated by those who saw the participation requirements as a threat to their decision-making power. An amendment to the EOA passed in 1967 further limited shared decision-making power. The amendment “required an agency’s board of directors select locally elected officials to make up one-third of the board’s directors.” Another third was to be representatives from the private sector (“Office of Economic Opportunity” n.d.).

Model Cities Program

In 1965, continuing his war on poverty and effort to tackle urban problems in the wake of social unrest and racial tensions, president Johnson formed the Task Force on Urban Problems, a group “responsible for drafting the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act, which created the Model Cities Program” (Gaber 2019, 194).

From 1966 to 1974, the Model Cities program designated federal funding to support “physical and socioeconomic improvements” (Urban Omnibus 2016) in “declining urban communities” (Gaber 2019, 189). Though the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) Task Force made an effort to define citizen participation, there were many divergent interpretations and opinions within the organization, leaving “hundreds of community groups asking, “What is citizen participation?” and receiving no consistent answer from HUD officials” (Gaber 2019, 189). Some perceived participation as simply seeking input from “local power elites;” others emphasized grassroots community action (Gaber 2019, 194). Enter Sherry Arnstein. As the chief advisor on citizen participation,

Arnstein was to bring clarity to the Model Cities program. (Gaber 2019, 189). As a result, in 1969, Sherry Arnstein wrote and published A Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein 1969; Gaber 2019). Often shortened to “Arnstein’s Ladder,” her metaphor for public participation is perhaps the most influential depiction of engagement and continues to resonate today (Gaber 2019; Lyles and White 2019; 288).

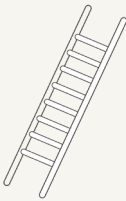
Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation

Recognizing the distribution(s) of power as a core difference between the various perceptions and approaches to public participation, Arnstein defined engagement as “a categorical term for citizen power” (Arnstein 1969). What Arnstein saw in the confusion of HUD’s Model Cities program were different categories of engagement which translated to different levels on a metaphorical “ladder” represented in Figure 2.1. Each rung of the ladder represents increasing levels of citizen power in decision-making processes. Climbing the ladder, participation moves from “illusory” or “distorted” forms of nonparticipation on the bottom rungs to legitimate power and complete control at the topmost rung (Arnstein 1969, 26-27). The middle rungs, while important steps towards genuine participation, too often fail to move beyond tokenistic participation—participating for the sake of participation with no real intention or guarantee of follow through.

Arnstein makes an important distinction between nonparticipation and participation, noting “there is a critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process” (Arnstein 1969, 24). In this model, the redistribution of power to change the status quo becomes an important indicator for genuine participation.

“It is not surprising that the level of citizen participation in the vast majority of Model Cities programs is at the placation rung of the ladder or below. Policy-makers at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) were determined to return the genie of citizen power to the bottle from which it had escaped (in most cities) as a result of the provision stipulating “maximum feasible participation” (Arnstein 1969, 29).

Arnstein’s Ladder



“Though no one...has absolute control, it is very important that the rhetoric not be confused with intent” (Arnstein 1969, 32).

Citizen control provides the public with the level of control needed to fully impact decision-making that impacts them.

Delegated power occurs when some level of control is given to the public. The public “hold[s]...significant cards to assure accountability of the program to them” (Arnstein 1969, 31).

Partnership involves redistributing power to provide the public with more impact on decision-making. In most cases however, power is “taken” by the public rather than voluntarily shared (Arnstein 1969, 31).

Placation provides the public with a limited level of impact on decision-making, but participation is still primarily used to appease the public and program requirements.

Consultation occurs when the public is asked for their input, often through “attitude surveys, neighborhood meetings, and public hearings” (Arnstein 1969, 28). However, there is no guarantee that public input will be applied during decision-making.

Informing involves a one-way flow of information. The public is informed of decision-making through “news media, pamphlets, posters, and responses to inquiries,” but given no channel for feedback (Arnstein 1969, 27).

Therapy is based on the assumption that “powerlessness is synonymous with mental illness” (Arnstein 1969, 28). The public is subjected to “clinical group therapy,” which serves as a band-aid to their perceived “illness,” rather than addressing its systemic, root causes.

Manipulation distorts participation as a “public relations vehicle.” The public is placed on advisory committees and advisory boards (such as those established under urban renewal policies) that serve primarily to “engineer support” and fulfill program requirements (Arnstein 1696, 26).

Figure 2.1 Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (adapted from Arnstein 1969)

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

Three decades after Arnstein published *A Ladder of Citizen Participation*, the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), an organization devoted to promoting and advancing public participation, published the Spectrum of Public Participation. The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation shares many similarities with Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation; both seek to categorize engagement along a spectrum that represents increased power and impact on the decision. The IAP2 Spectrum however, turns Arnstein’s ladder on its side, softening the implied hierarchy of the levels of engagement. Additionally, the Spectrum consolidates engagement into five categories: inform (no influence), consult, involve, collaborate, and empower (total influence). Each type is represented as a column in a chart, shown in Figure 2.2, that further outlines the goal of participation as well as the promise to the public (IAP2 n.d.). The levels of participation correlate to the community’s level of influence over decision-making. Most participation falls in one of the middle three columns.

While Arnstein’s Ladder and the IAP2 Spectrum are perhaps the most widely accepted definitions of engagement, they’re not without critique or disagreement. Placing the various forms of engagement on a spectrum can be misconstrued as ranking them as ‘bad’ and ‘good’ or ‘worst’ and ‘best.’

Additionally, others point out that engagement is much more nuanced and complex than clear cut categories. Arnstein herself acknowledges the simplification of the ladder: “in the real world...there might be 150 rungs with less sharp...distinctions among them” (Arnstein 1969, 26). These spectrums are static snapshots of engagement intended to provide a base understanding and help those leading engagement select the appropriate level of engagement.

IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public Participation Goal	“To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.”	“To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.”	“To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.”	“To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.”	“To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.”
Promise to the Public	“We will keep you informed.”	“We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.”	“We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.”	“We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.”	“We will implement what you decide.”

Figure 2.2 IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation (adapted from IAP2 n.d.)

Thick & Thin Participation

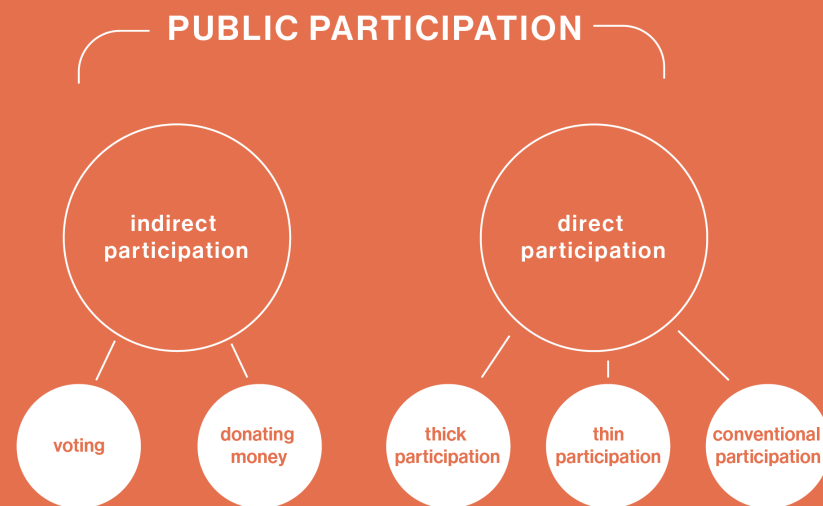


Figure 2.3 Thick, Thin & Conventional Participation (adapted from Nabatchi and Leighninger 2015, 15)

Thick, Thin & Conventional Engagement

Tina Nabatchi and Matt Legihninger, authors of *Public Participation for a 21st Century Democracy*, take a different approach to defining engagement. While still acknowledging the distinctions in quality, they focus more on the characteristics of engagement activities than the level of power or influence. Nabatchi and Leighninger distinguish between indirect and direct participation shown in Figure 2.3. Focusing on direct participation “in which citizens are personally involved and actively engaged in providing input, making decisions, and solving problems,” they further describe three types of participation—thick, thin, and conventional (Nabatchi and Leighninger 2015). According to Nabatchi and Leighninger, thick participation engages large groups of people to “learn, decide, and act” through thorough and often time consuming processes of dialogue, deliberation, and action planning (2015, 14). On the other hand, thin participation “activates people as individuals rather than in groups” and provides them “with opportunities to express their ideas, opinions, or concerns in a way that requires only a few moments of their time” (Nabatchi and Leighninger 2015, 17-19). Thick and thin participation are strengthened when they are applied together and embedded into larger engagement plans and sustained by larger engagement systems (Nabatchi and Leighninger 2015, 19-20).

The third type of participation that Nabatchi and Leighninger define is conventional participation. Conventional participation includes older, standardized methods that were developed to uphold order, fulfill legal mandates, and provide citizens with checks on government power. They are typified by public hearings or meetings with strict preset agendas, audience-style room set-ups, and limited opportunities for public comment (Nabatchi and Leighninger 2015, 21). While the most common form of participation, conventional methods have become formulaic, superficial, and stagnant. They provide limited opportunities for community empowerment and can even be harmful to larger engagement efforts (de la Peña *et al.* 2017, 1).

Barriers to Engagement Faced by Communities

The nature of engaging with broad and diverse communities brings many challenges. These barriers stem from various social and demographic factors that impact access to engagement as well as historical and deep-rooted systems that impact trust in the decision-making processes. Immigrants, people of color, and persons with disabilities often face barriers that prevent them from participating in community engagement (Garcia, Garfinkle-Castro, and Pfeiffer 2019).

Awareness & Access to Information (Knowledge)

In order to participate, people need to know how to participate. A lack of awareness and understanding about public decision-making processes, (and people's roles in them) presents barriers to participation (Lai and Hynie 2010; Garcia, Garfinkle-Castro, and Pfeiffer 2019). Not only do people need to know how the decision-making process works in general, but they need to know that there's an opportunity to participate and the specifics of their involvement and opportunity to influence decision-making.

Meeting Schedules

The time of engagement meetings or events may also present barriers to participation. Timing may conflict with important community activities “such as religious services or cultural events” or with work schedules (Garcia, Garfinkle-Castro, and Pfeiffer 2019, 70).

Getting to Engagement Meetings or Events (Transportation)

Getting to engagement meetings or events can be a challenge for people who don't have access to transportation, whether through personal vehicles or public transportation. Poor transportation infrastructure or lack of public transportation make getting to engagement difficult (Garcia, Garfinkle-Castro, and Pfeiffer 2019, 69-70).

Location

The physical and social accessibility of the location, space, or room in which engagement meetings or events happen may present challenges for people with disabilities or low mobility. Additionally, the location may impact levels of comfort. Places such as private buildings, government offices, or highly gendered spaces may make some people, such as undocumented immigrants, feel unwelcome and hesitant to participate. Public spaces, such as community centers, churches, schools or parks on the other hand, feel more neutral and

potentially more welcoming (Garcia, Garfinkle-Castro, and Pfeiffer 2019).

Meeting Format and Structure

The ways in which information is presented and communicated may present barriers to participation, particularly for people with cognitive disabilities or learning disorders. It is important that designers consider the physical accessibility of the location and the room layout as well as the ways in which information is presented and communicated.

Furthermore, the techniques and tools used for engagement may present barriers. People must know how to use the tools for participation. This concern is increasingly relevant as many engagement activities move to virtual formats. Which may present challenges for people without access to technology or with limited knowledge on how to use technology.

Language and Literacy Barriers

The most frequently cited communication challenge is language barriers among community members whose first language is not English (Fernandez 2018, Lai and Hynie 2010). This not only prevents nonnative speakers from learning about community engagement events through marketing and promotion materials, but it also limits their ability to participate and provide input and ideas.

Costs

Costs associated with participating in engagement may include “transportation, child care, or food, all of which may be beyond individual budget” (Garcia, Garfinkle-Castro, and Pfeiffer 2019, 71). Furthermore, some people may not see engagement as worth their time. Providing incentives, such as monetary compensation or food/child care, is one way to overcome this challenge.

Trust

Beyond logistical challenges to access and participation, there are deep seeded systemic barriers to engagement. Communities who have repeatedly experienced engagement processes that have resulted in over promises and lack of follow-through may lose trust in public decision-making processes. These communities may be hesitant or resistant to future engagement efforts. It is important to rebuild trust and relationships with these communities in order to facilitate effective community engagement.

Connecting Engagement and Landscape Architecture

Public participation and community engagement became prominent themes in the planning and design fields during the mid-twentieth century. As part of the participation requirements set forth in the urban planning policy developments of the 1960s, planners and designers began integrating participation into the design process. Until recently however, this participation tended to be confined to conventional methods and was practiced more as a “check the box” requirement by many practitioners. Recent calls for more democratic design have spurred a shift in landscape architecture practice, leading to more robust engagement services facilitated by landscape architects. Moreover, landscape architects are exploring unique ways to integrate engagement into planning and design processes and are developing innovative, creative tools to facilitate meaningful engagement.

History of Engagement in Landscape Architecture

The prominence of participation and engagement in the field of landscape architecture coincided with the intersection of social movements during the mid-twentieth century. As shown in Figure 2.4, during this time many grassroots organizations such as Planners for Equal Opportunity and Architects' Renewal Committee in Harlem were formed. These organizations sought to shake up the status quo of top-down, client + designer, expert-driven planning and design models. Ideas related to advocacy planning and participatory design began to emerge and take hold. It was also at this time that participation was also written into federal policies and programs such as the Urban Renewal Program, Community Action Program, and Model Cities program. More recent ideas such as placemaking, tactical urbanism, and community wealth building continue to push the boundaries of traditional planning and design towards socially-motivated and community-driven practices.

1966 Declaration of Concern

A small group of landscape architects assembled by the Landscape Architecture Foundation's (LAF) drafted a Declaration of Concern. While highlighting the need for “collaborative solutions,” their declaration neglected to address landscape architecture's role in issues of social justice or equity, instead focusing heavily on the environmental concerns of the time (LAF 1966; Wooten 2016).

ASLA Public Policy Statements

The American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) publishes public policy statements. These statements are “external documents, adopted by the Board of Trustees, reflecting positions on specific issues, from the perspective of the Society and the profession of landscape architecture” (ASLA n.d.). ASLA's current policy statement on community engagement evolved from the policy on *Art Commissions and Other Reviewing Authorities* first published in 1964. The statement was revised in 1985, but remained under the name *Art Commissions and Other Reviewing Authorities*. These first two versions recommended that “all proposals for new public work and changes in existing public properties be submitted, prior to construction, to a disinterested public body formed for the purpose of passing judgment on the artistic merits of the proposals” (ASLA 1964). The statement invokes the idea of the public providing input on proposals (namely artistic commissions), but maintains that “such group or art commission should not have approval authority” (ASLA 1964). In 2001 a new policy on *Citizen*

The Evolution of Engagement in Planning & Design

The following timeline highlights important policies and events that shaped community engagement in the fields of planning and design.

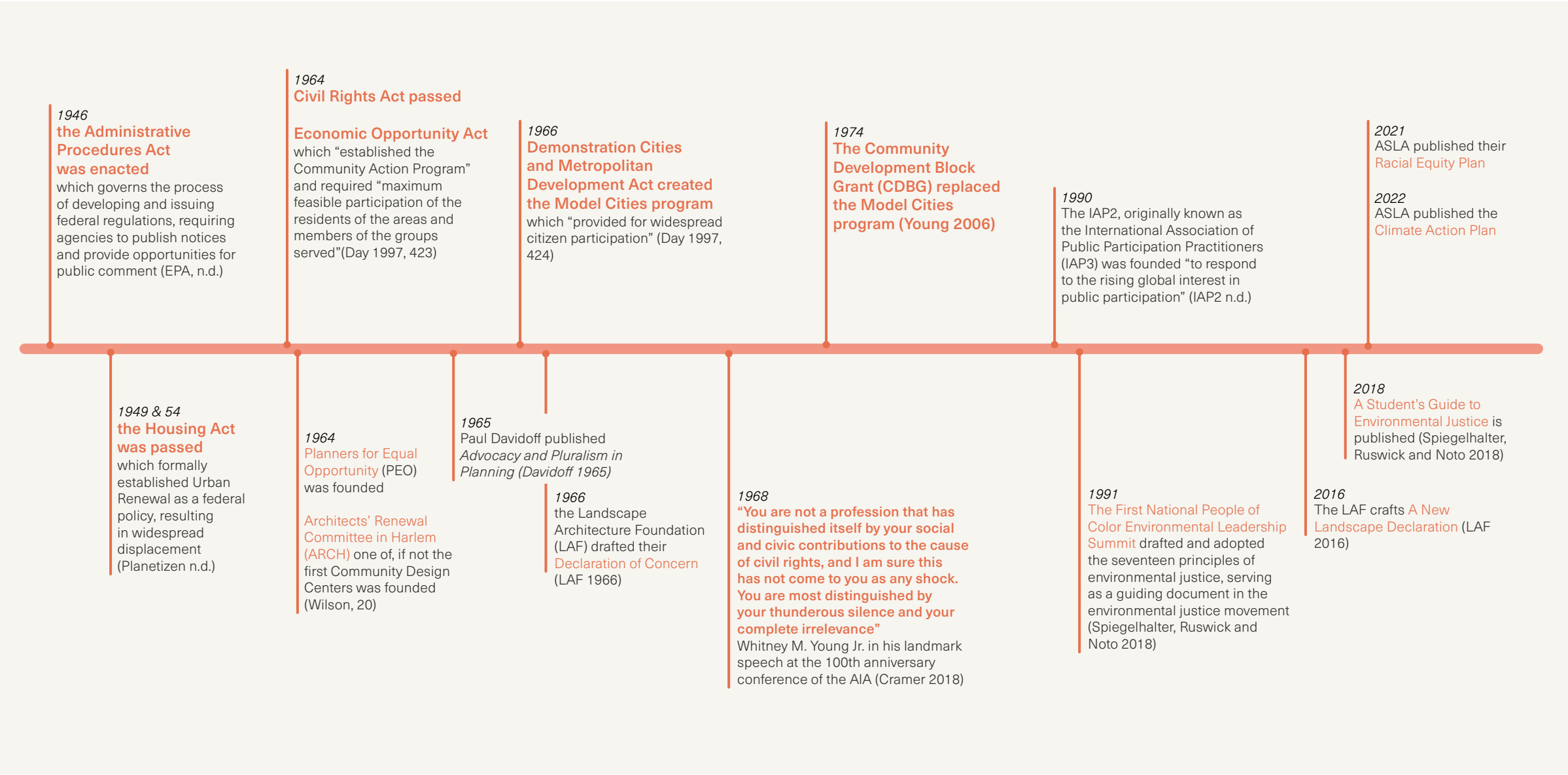


Figure 2.4 The Evolution of Engagement in Planning & Design: A Timeline (Siler 2023)

Participation replaced *Art Commissions and Other Reviewing Authorities*. This revision broadened the scope of public review to include all works of planning and design (instead of a narrow focus on art commissions). The 2001 statement recommends that “all public projects...should be subject to public review and discussion prior to construction” (ASLA 2001). It uses phrases such as “consult” and “build support” (ASLA 2001). In 2008 the statement was retitled *Public Participation*. The wording also changed, describing “public involvement” in all phases of an “open, participatory design process” (ASLA 2008). The most recent revision of the policy statement in 2022, titled *Community & Stakeholder Engagement*, supports the “active and intentional engagement of the community and stakeholders in all phases of planning, design, and implementation processes” (ASLA 2022). Furthermore it recognizes engagement as a “critical strategy for advancing goals of inclusivity, social equity, and informed decision-making into [landscape architecture] projects” (ASLA 2022). It also highlights the unique role landscape architects have in leading and supporting community engagement processes:

“Landscape architects, through their education and training, are well-suited to lead and support open, accessible, and participatory community and stakeholder engagement processes. Landscape architects unify design elements between disciplines and use graphic, verbal, and written communication techniques to involve all populations in the decision-making process. These skill sets are used to convene, communicate, and incorporate diverse community and stakeholder feedback to achieve equitable and inclusive outcomes” (ASLA 2022).

Now More Than Ever

More recently, landscape architects have become stronger advocates for community engagement. In 2016 a diverse group of leading landscape architects gathered at the 50th anniversary of LAF to craft a New Landscape Declaration. Their call to action recognized landscape architecture’s unique position to foster “new alliances to address complex social and ecological problems” and promote “ideals of equity, sustainability, resilience, and democracy” (LAF 2016; Wooten 2016). Building on calls for more democratic design, in 2017, several landscape architects contributed to the book *Design as Democracy: Techniques for Collective Creativity*. In its introduction, *Design as Democracy* calls on landscape

architects to renew and reform conventional, standardized engagement techniques. It proposes several new, creative, and meaningful ways to engage communities in participatory and democratic planning and design processes (de la Peña *et al.* 2017; Green 2018). In 2018, landscape architecture students published *A Student’s Guide for Environmental Justice*. This guide brings up important considerations about social and environmental justice within design processes (Spiegelhalter, Ruswick and Noto 2018).

The value and need for inclusive and equitable engagement has become especially prominent in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and resurgence of racial justice movements. Around the time of these “twin pandemics,” there were many conversations among landscape architects about how to make community engagement processes more open, accessible, and inclusive and how to address systemic inequities in both design processes and the built environment? A webinar hosted by LAF in April of 2020 titled, *Community Engagement: Strategies, Tools, and Lessons for the Pandemic and Beyond*, urged landscape architects to “continue to be disruptive in community engagement...[Landscape architects’] work has to create spaces, value, and processes that will disrupt existing inequalities and injustices in our society, but our work almost must reckon with the legacy of design including landscape architecture in creating those inequalities in the built environment. We can reconcile these through community-engaged design as a model for a more equitable future for the built environment” (LAF 2020).

More recently, in 2021 and 2022, a number of efforts on behalf of ASLA, such as the Racial Equity Plan, the Climate Action Plan and Field Guide, and the 2022 Community & Stakeholder Engagement Policy Statement, have furthered prominence of community engagement within the field (ASLA 2021; ASLA 2022). Additionally, more and more landscape architecture firms are embracing community engagement as a core service within their practice.



Figure 2.5 Expert Driven to Community Driven;
Product Oriented to Capacity Oriented
(adapted from Wilson 2019, 17)

A Landscape Architecture Definition

In *Resilience for All*, author Barbara Brown Wilson offers another way to define and categorize engagement through a narrower lens specifically related to planning and design. The various terms used to describe engagement and community-driven practice within planning and design are broad. They “imply different approaches, but the nuances of difference are subtle, and the ways in which they are implemented vary widely in response to the context in which they are working” (Wilson 2019, 16).

“The easiest way I have found to understand these approaches,” writes Barbara Brown Wilson, “is on a continuum that, rather than being defined as good-bad or authentic-fake, is defined by the balance of local and technical expertise that drives the decision-making processes and the focus of intervention itself” (2019, 16). With input from 40 leaders in the field, Wilson attempted to map the various terms and “constellation of practices” within planning and design along a continuum as shown in Figure 2.5 (2019, 16).

This includes two continuum, one from related to power dynamics between those involved in engagement ranging from expert-driven to community-driven and another related to outcomes of engagement processes ranging from product-oriented to capacity-oriented.

Again, Wilson notes that this continuum is to be understood “not as a permanent set of labels,” but as a starting point to orient users. In reality these terms are fluid.

A Definition of Engagement for this Project

In this project, the definition of engagement is left intentionally broad to encompass a range of methods that meaningfully and actively involve communities in problem-solving or decision-making processes pertaining to plans and designs that shape the physical, built environment. This report will focus on direct forms of participation that tend towards thick, active processes that allow communities and designers to collaborate and plan and design together.

Community engagement is landscape architecture practice is strengthened when integrated throughout the entire design process. The typical design process includes five phases: pre-design, concept design, schematic design, design, development, and construction documentation (Design Workshop 2016). During each phase, there are a variety of decisions that influence project outcomes. For example, in the pre-design phase decisions are broadly centered around project scope and timeline, project goals, opportunities, and parameters, and preliminary vision and programming. During the concept and schematic design phases, decisions more narrowly assess the project site history and context, programming and design precedents, and design framework. These phases focus on big ideas to guide the programming of the project site as well as spatial organization. Plan or design alternatives are also explored during these phases. During the design development phase, plan or design alternatives are further narrowed down to select the final outcome (Design Workshop 2016).

Community engagement is a cyclical and iterative process that may be repeated multiple times during each phase of the design process. When landscape architects are the ones facilitating community engagement, they are better able to connect the communities input and ideas to the plan or design decisions at each phase of the process.

Techniques and Tools

Many landscape architects have refined or developed engagement methods of their own—techniques and tools to foster engagement. These range from synchronous, face-to-face/in-person techniques to digital, asynchronous methods.

Mobilizing a Project

Building awareness around a project is an important first step. Connecting with the right people in the community to ground the project is necessary to spread the word. Many landscape architects have turned to digital means to spread awareness, such as sharing infographics on the city's or local community organization's social media. Many projects also have websites, either stand alone or built into the city's webpage, that act as a homebase for information and updates related to project and engagement events.

When digital means aren't reaching the right people, landscape architects can turn to door-to-door canvassing. Though time consuming, going door-to-door, talking with people in the community or leaving postcards/flyers is an effective way to spread the word about engagement events.

Understanding Place & People

It is important to have a base understanding of the people and place. While some of this pre-work can take place in the design office—"poring over maps and aerial photos [and] ...reading demographic data," landscape architects gain a much richer and deeper understanding by immersing themselves in the community (de la Peña *et al.* 2017, 46). Casual observations or chatting with neighbors reveal the overlooked, mundane, day-to-day experience of the community (de la Peña *et al.* 2017, 46).

Local Knowledge & Input

De la Peña *et al.* describe engagement as transactive—"a process of give-and-take"—an exchange of information and ideas (2017, 2). There are a variety of techniques landscape architects use to gather input from communities, such as surveys, written feedback, or hands-on interactive processes such as mapping to ground these ideas to a place or visual image.

Methodology

Methodology Overview

Document Analysis

Document Selection Criteria
Document Analysis Framework

Interviews

The Interview Process
Participant Selection Criteria
A Landscape Architecture Lens
Interview Question Framework

Methodology Overview

This project used a mixed-methods approach that included document analysis and interviews to identify what landscape architecture students and emerging professionals should know about incorporating community engagement into practice. Document analysis provided a base understanding, while interviews added depth and diverse perspectives.

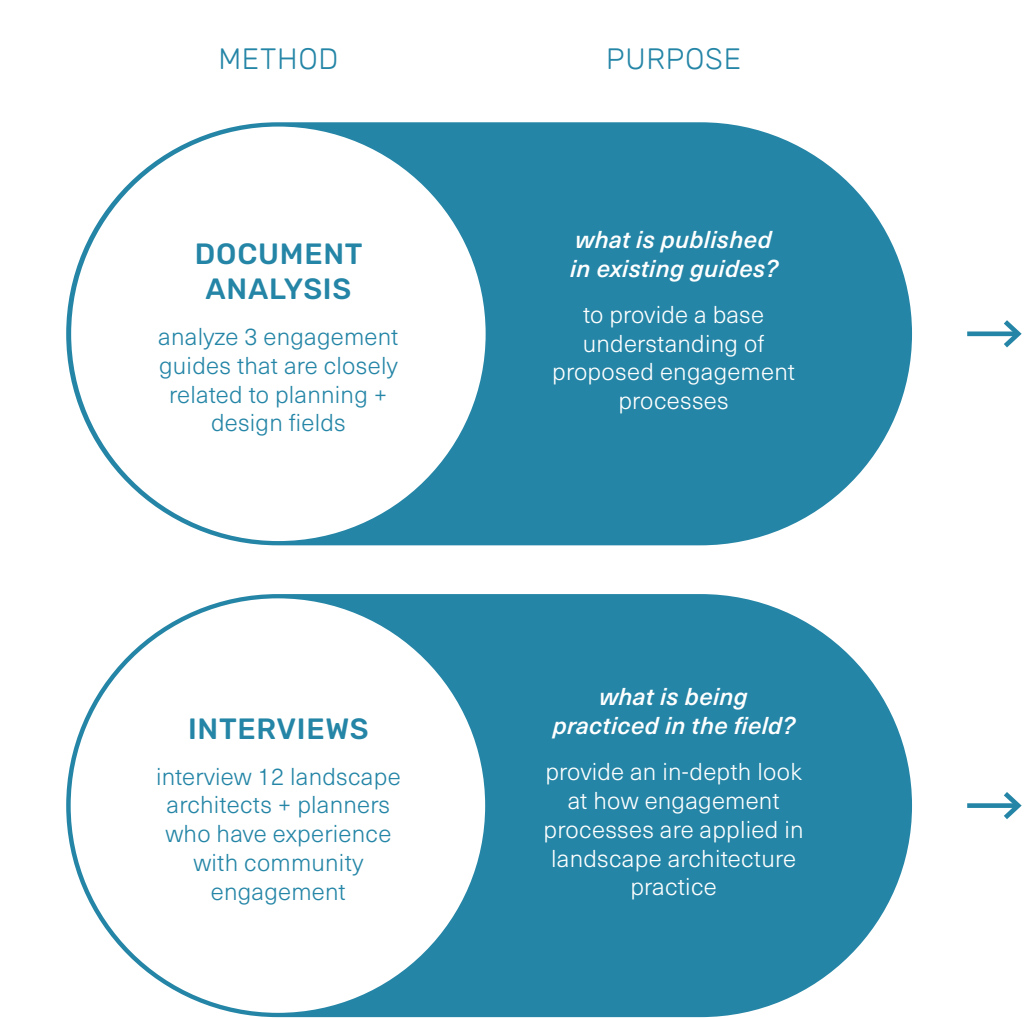
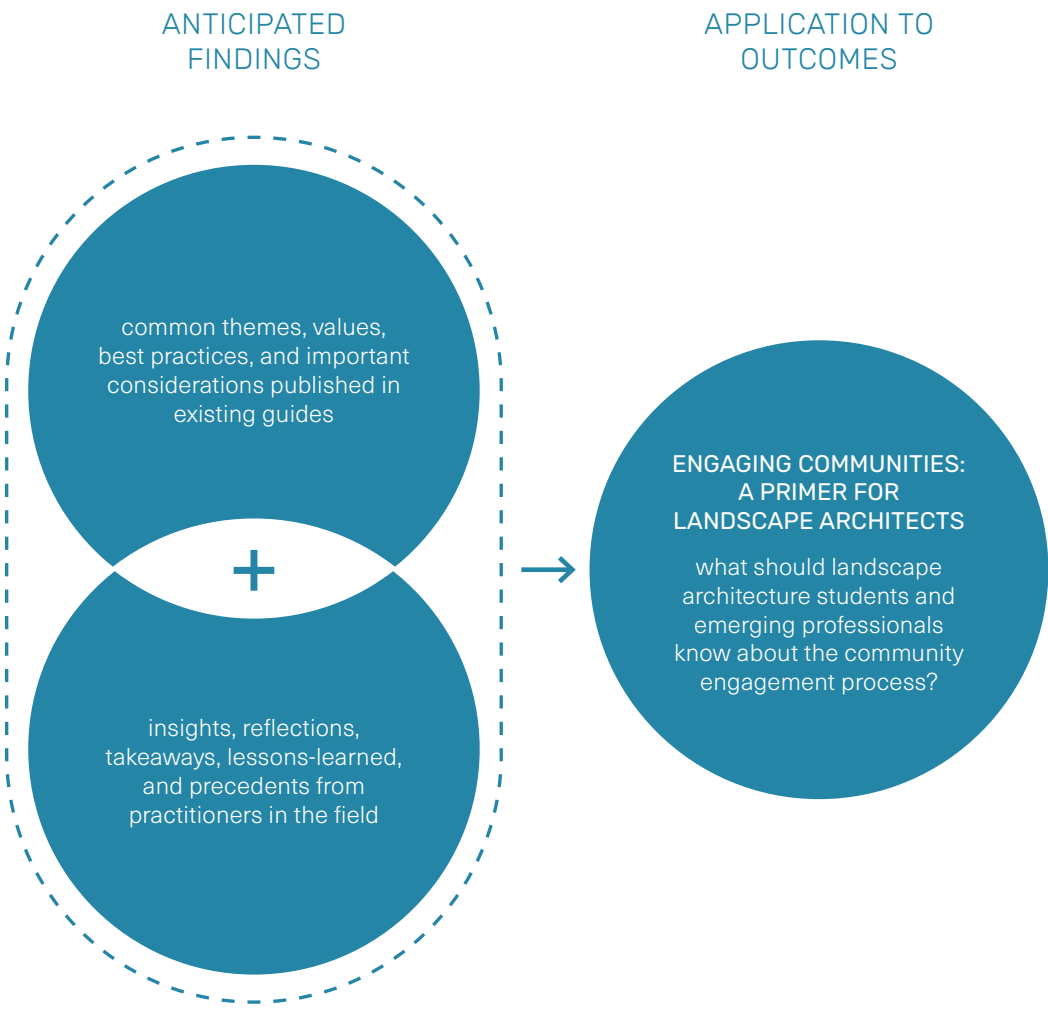


Figure 3.1 Methodology Overview (Siler 2023)

Document analysis and interviews layered **theory** (*what is published in existing guides*) and **practice** (*what is being practiced in the field*) to better understand aspects of the engagement process—the nuances, intricacies, and constraints of planning and implementing engagement—that landscape architecture students and emerging professionals should know about.



Document Analysis

method

analyze foundational published engagement guides that are relevant to planning + design fields

purpose

to provide a base understanding of existing engagement processes

Document Selection Criteria

There is a wide array of existing published guides related to community engagement. They range from theoretical models that seek to define and classify engagement to practical “how-to” guides that walk through the steps of engagement. In between are guides that provide an overview of values and important considerations while also providing instruction.

Some are written for specific outcomes like keeping a community informed or building community capacity, while others are written for specific contexts such as empowering youth, healing trauma, or creating healthy places. **Given this variety, documents were selected and reviewed for their relevance and application to the field of landscape architecture.** Additional consideration was given to the depth and thoroughness of content, specifically relating to the engagement process.

The three selected documents were:

- *The EPA Public Participation Guide*
- *Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement*
- *The NRPA Community Engagement Resource Guide*

THE EPA

Public Participation Guide

Originally published in 2011 by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the *EPA Public Participation Guide* is a comprehensive overview of public participation and engagement processes. Organized sequentially, the guide walks through the engagement process, from performing initial assessments, to developing a participation plan, to selecting effective tools to implement. Its logical flow and thorough detail make it easy to understand and valuable for review. Furthermore, it highlights important knowledge, skills, and behaviors that those organizing and leading engagement processes should know, making it applicable to the intended audience of this report.

Beyond Inclusion: equity in public engagement

A GUIDE FOR PRACTITIONERS

Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement was published in 2020 by Simon Fraser University’s Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, a Canadian institution dedicated to dialogue and engagement. It outlines eight principles to guide meaningful and equitable engagement. The principles are organized loosely in sequential order of the engagement process, with some overlap between each. Though *Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement* is written for a broader range of disciplines, its emphasis on equity and distinction between inclusive and equitable processes makes it particularly relevant for analysis.

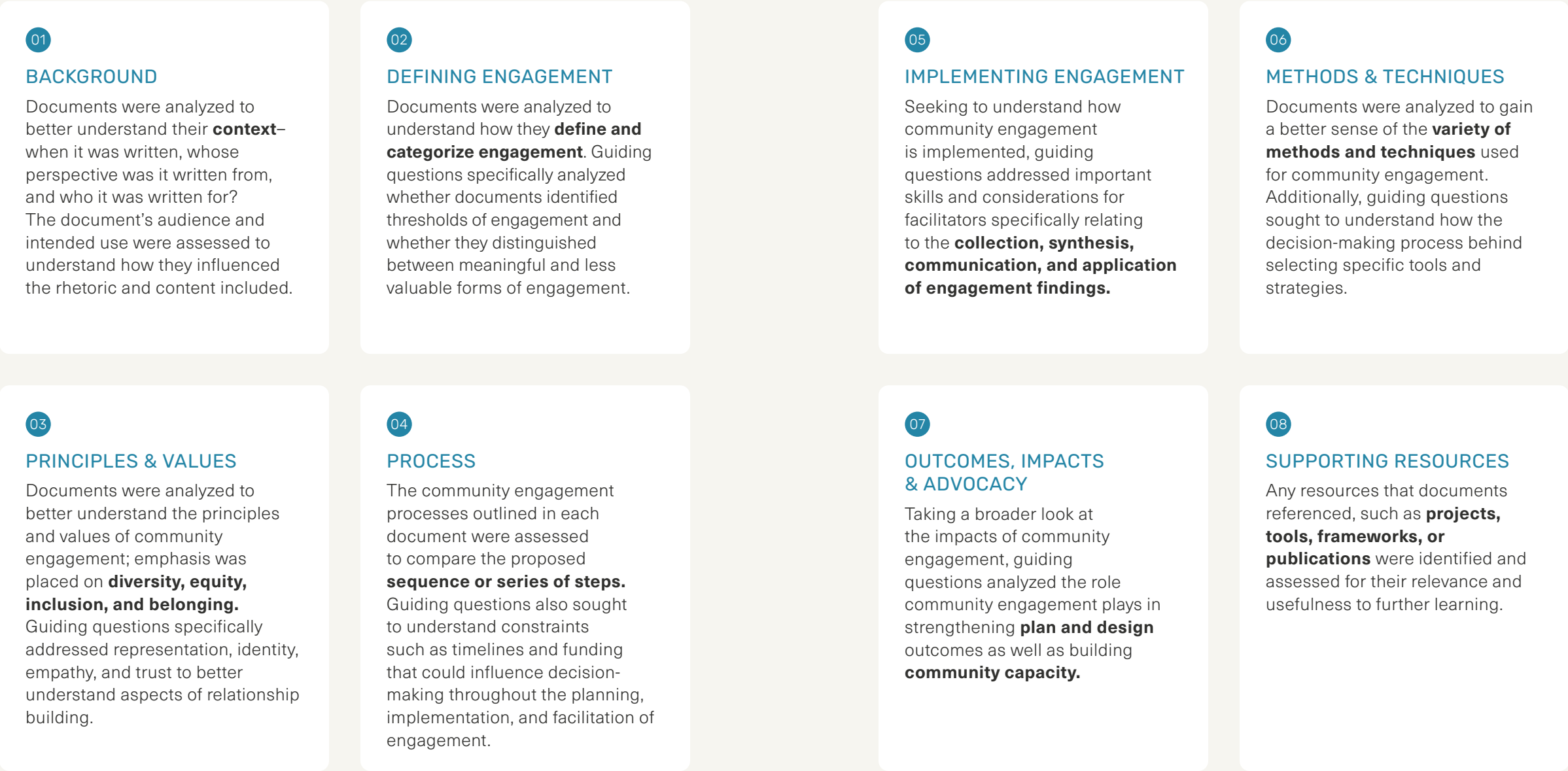
THE NRPA

Community Engagement Resource Guide

Created specifically for park and recreation professionals by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), the *NRPA Community Engagement Resource Guide* divides the engagement process into four themes with an emphasis on inclusion and equity throughout. Additionally, it layers in information on the logistical side of engagement, such as staffing and funding considerations. Though less thorough than the two other guides, it is most closely related to the field of landscape architecture.

Document Analysis Framework

Documents were analyzed through a framework of guiding questions. The guiding questions were grouped into eight broad analysis categories. Below is a brief description of each category:



Document Analysis Framework

Within each category, a set of guiding questions helped to extract relevant information. Below are the specific questions within each category:

01

BACKGROUND

- Title of Document
- Author
- Date of Publication
- Published In / Published By
- Intended Audience
- Purpose, Goals & Primary Use
- Document Length

02

DEFINING ENGAGEMENT

- Does the document use one term consistently or multiple interchangeably (i.e. public participation or community engagement)?
- How does the document define engagement? By type? Form? Level?
- How does the document categorize/rank engagement? On a hierarchical scale? Or nominal spectrum?
- Does the document distinguish between authentic and meaningful engagement and less valuable forms of engagement?
- How does the document recommend determining the amount or level of engagement?
- What factors influence authentic, meaningful and successful engagement? Unsuccessful engagement?

03

PRINCIPLES & VALUES

- What principles and values does the document outline?
- What aspects of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging does the document discuss?
- What factors influence inclusion & equity in engagement processes?
- What relationships does the document describe in engagement processes?
- How does the document describe relationship building?
- How does the document recommend identifying who to engage?
- What does the document mention about conflict management?
- What does the document mention about empathy and understanding?
- What does the document mention about trauma, trust, and transparency?

04

PROCESS

- How does the document present and describe the process of community engagement? Sequentially? A series of phases or steps? Decision-making questions? Guiding principles or values?
- What steps to engagement does the document outline?
- What challenges does the document anticipate? What constraints does the document anticipate? Timeline, budgets, political pressures, lack of participation, etc?

Document Analysis Framework (cont.)

05

IMPLEMENTING ENGAGEMENT

- How does the document describe the role and responsibilities of the organizer/leader/facilitator of engagement?
- What resources or skills does the document mention are needed/beneficial for community engagement?
- How does the document recommend collecting and representing data?
- How does the document describe synthesizing data, making meaning from the findings, and applying findings?

06

METHODS & TECHNIQUES

- What strategies/methods/techniques/tools does the document describe or recommend?
- How does the document recommend selecting strategies/methods/techniques/tools?

07

OUTCOMES, IMPACTS & ADVOCACY

- What outcomes of engagement does the document describe? Policy, plan, design, informing, learning, decision-making, community building, action, etc?
- How does the document describe community building/community capacity?
- What positive outcomes/benefits of engagement does the document describe?
- How does the document describe the value and importance of community engagement?
- Does the document address feedback and evaluation?
- What does the document emphasize as the “most important” thing about community engagement?

08

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

- What other resources or examples does the document reference?

Interviews

method

interview landscape architects +
planners who have experience with
community engagement

purpose

to provide an in-depth look at
how engagement processes
are implemented in landscape
architecture practice

The Interview Process

In-depth, semi-structured interviews provided an opportunity to gain insight and a deeper understanding of how landscape architecture practitioners are developing and implementing community engagement as a core service within their practice.

The goal was to learn from practitioners' experience and takeaways—What's working? What's not? What's still being figured out? How has engagement evolved and what's in store for the future? Interviews also captured the nuances and intricacies of the engagement process that are not often documented in published texts.

Interviews included a list of standard questions with follow-up, clarifying questions as needed. Each conversation lasted between 30-45 minutes. Interviews were conducted virtually and digitally recorded and transcribed.

Participant Selection Criteria

An initial list of prominent landscape architecture firms was compiled through the American Society of Landscape Architects' (ASLA) resources such as the firm finder, national awards, and national conference sessions. Potential participants were first identified from this list through an examination of prominent landscape architecture firms' mission and values as well as their services and body of work as shown in Figure 3.2.

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT CRITERIA



Figure 3.2 Participant Selection Criteria (Siler 2023)

Initially, five landscape architecture firms were identified as leaders in community engagement. The selected firms stood out not only for their dedication to mission-driven and community-oriented work, but also to their commitment and desire to educate and share their process with others, particularly students and emerging professionals.

To capture a wider range of perspectives, additional firms and individuals were identified based on either their connection to a specific community engagement project or for their research and specialized knowledge related to community engagement as shown in Figure 3.3.

ADDITIONAL PARTICIPANT SELECTION CRITERIA



Figure 3.3 Additional Participant Selection Criteria (Siler 2023)

Potential participants at each of the identified firms were further narrowed down based on their position within the firm, project experience, and ability to participate. The selected participants were sent an invitation to participate via email. Those who were unable to participate were asked to suggest others at their firm who may be available for an interview.

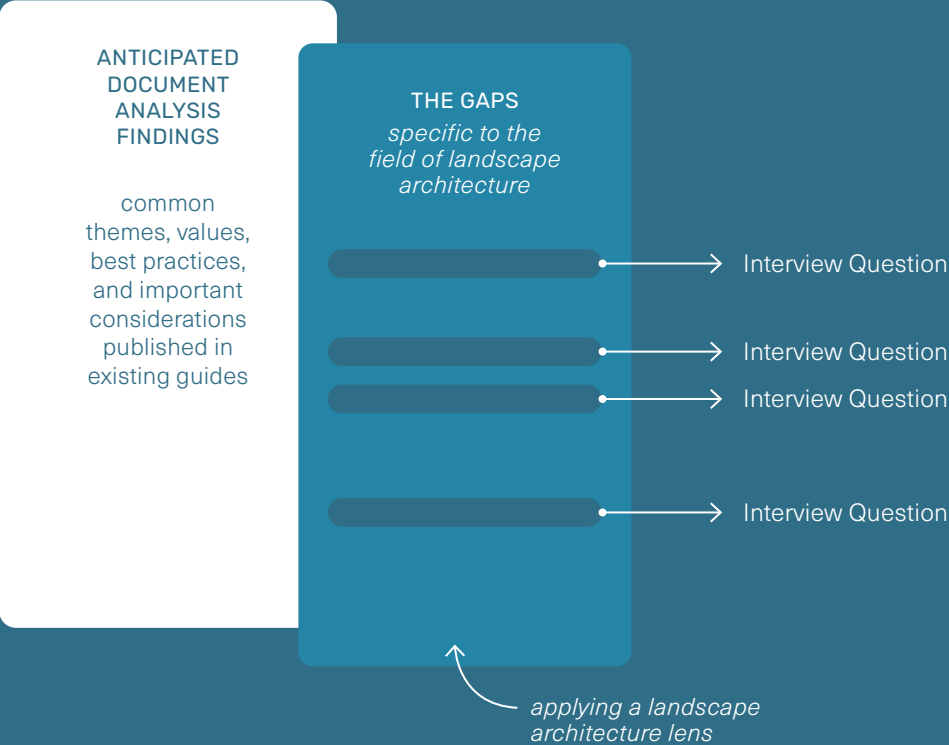


Figure 3.4 Document Analysis Gaps (Siler 2023)

A Landscape Architecture Lens

Using background knowledge of landscape architecture practice, documents were reviewed and analyzed through a “landscape architecture lens.” As documents were read, mental notes were taken pertaining to the information that was included (or not included) that could be directly applicable to landscape architecture practice. The lens helped identify the gaps specific to the field landscape architecture—in other words, information that was missing from existing guides that could be relevant or pertinent to landscape architects. For example, existing guides that were written for a broader audience lacked specific considerations related to planning and design processes and planning and design outcomes. As illustrated in Figure 3.4, these gaps then informed the development of the interview questions on the following page. Interview questions addressed landscape architecture specific considerations that, when layered on top of the general considerations outlined in existing guides, provided a richer, more discipline-specific perspective on community engagement processes.

Interview Question Framework

Interview questions were categorized into four broad categories. The questions within each category sought to uncover and understand the “behind the scenes” aspects of community engagement in landscape architecture practice—insights and lessons-learned that are difficult to glean from existing published guides and limited experience in practice.

01

NATURE & EVOLUTION OF ENGAGEMENT

In recent years there has been a heightened focus on community engagement (and equitable outcomes) in landscape architecture practice. Can you speak to any changes that you have seen within the field?

02

APPROACH & PROCESS

Does [firm] have a defined/formal approach and process for planning and facilitating community engagement—a set of guidelines or best practices?

- How formalized or adaptable is your approach?
- Do you follow a similar process project to project?

Can you describe how [firm] developed the community engagement strategy/plan for [project]?

- What are the steps to creating an engagement plan?
- Is it written out/outlined at the beginning of a project?
- What information is included?
- How detailed is it?
- How far in advance does it plan for?

When writing project proposals/contracts, how do you determine the scope of the community engagement from project onset? And at what level of detail was engagement planned during the project proposal/contract stage?

- What information do you need to know to write a proposal/contract?
- To what level of detail do you get into ahead of time/before starting the project?

- Do you define the type and number of engagements you will have?
- How are contracts amended based on evolving engagement needs?
- How do you determine the resources (financial, staff, skill, etc.) needed to do engagement?

03

IMPLEMENTING ENGAGEMENT

What is/has proven to be the most valuable skill(s) when planning and facilitating engagement?

What are some important considerations when collecting and representing data and communicating engagement findings?

- What data is most valuable to collect?
- What methods do you use to gather qualitative data?
- What are important considerations when creating graphics?

Once you have designed a community engagement process, how do you synthesize and make meaning from the data/findings? How do you respond to the findings?

04

OUTCOMES, IMPACTS & ADVOCACY

How have you seen/How can community engagement contribute to community building?

- What does it mean to build community capacity for leadership and collaborative problem-solving?

What resources or guides do you reference to learn from and guide your community engagement process?

If you could teach students or young professionals one thing about community engagement, what would it be?

Document Analysis Findings

Findings

- 4.1 Background
- 4.2 Defining Engagement
- 4.3 Principles & Values
- 4.4 Engagement Process
- 4.5 Implementing Engagement
- 4.6 Methods & Techniques
- 4.7 Outcomes, Impacts & Advocacy

Overall Document Analysis Takeaways

4.1 Background

The following documents were analyzed. Each varied in terms of its intended audience and the breadth and depth of content. However, each document addressed important considerations when planning and implementing community engagement processes that were relevant and applicable to landscape architecture practice.

THE EPA

Public Participation Guide

Author

United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Date

2011

Published By/Published In

The guide can be viewed online at epa.gov. The guide is also available to download and has been translated into four languages.

Intended Audience

The guide is written for government agencies involved in the planning, implementation and management of public participation processes.

Document Length

96 pages

Beyond Inclusion:
equity in public engagement

A GUIDE FOR PRACTITIONERS

Author

Nicole Armos (*primary author*)

Date

2020

Published By/Published In

The guide is published by Simon Fraser University's Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue and is available to download online.

Intended Audience

The guide is written for "individuals sponsoring or planning public engagement initiatives that will inform decision-making in governments, organizations or institutions across sectors" (SFU 2020, 6).

Document Length

82 pages

THE NRPA

Community Engagement Resource Guide

Author

National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA)

Date

2019

Published By/Published In

The guide is published by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and is available to download online.

Intended Audience

The guide is written for park and recreation professionals to implement equitable engagement "around the planning, design, construction, maintenance and activation of park projects and park plans" (NRPA 2019, 3).

Document Length

25 pages

4.2 Defining Engagement

The EPA Public Participation Guide

The *EPA Public Participation Guide* primarily uses the term ‘public participation.’ It defines the purpose of participation as to “both inform the public and obtain input from them,” indicating that engagement exists on a spectrum (EPA 2011, 3). Throughout the guide, the different levels of participation are outlined following the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation: inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower. Each level of participation is directly related to the potential for public influence on a decision.

Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement

Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement pushes the definition of engagement to “move beyond inclusion and towards a practice of equity” (SFU 2020, 5). Phrases such as “collaborating,” “co-creating,” and “sharing power” are used to describe the practice of equity in engagement (SFU 2020, 5). *Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement* also references the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation when outlining the levels of engagement.

The NRPA Community Engagement Resource Guide

The *NRPA Community Engagement Resource Guide*’s definition of community engagement is more narrowly defined through the lens of public parks—“engagement ensures that our parks...are created by the people they are intended to serve” (NRPA 2019, 2). Inclusion and equity are also central to the guide’s definition of engagement and its purpose of creating better parks.

“any process that **directly** engages the public in **decision-making** and gives full consideration to public input in making that decision”

—*EPA Public Participation Guide*

“encompasses a **variety of activities** that meaningfully involve community members... to **inform decisions**...that will impact them”

—*Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement*

“an **ongoing and proactive process** of working collaboratively with all people in a community to build relationships and capacity, create solutions and foster a sense of ownership of public parks”

—*NRPA Community Engagement Resource Guide*

What do the definitions have in common?

Though the documents used different terms for engagement (i.e. public participation and community engagement), their definitions represented similar perceptions of engagement which are synthesized into the following four ideas:

Engagement involves people impacting decisions, whether it's concerning a program, policy, plan, or design.

Engagement is a process. Rather than a single, static action, it is an ongoing, continuous effort involving multiple repeated actions throughout a decision-making process. Community members are engaged from the very beginning of the planning and implementation of engagement.

Engagement exists on a spectrum. The level of engagement directly relates to the level of potential impact people have on a decision. Levels of engagement range from informing decisions to collaborating and co-creating solutions.

Meaningful engagement is accessible, inclusive and equitable. By applying the principles of equity, meaningful engagement aims to increase the public's impact on a decision.

Do the documents identify thresholds for engagement or distinguish between authentic and meaningful participation and less valuable forms of engagement?

All documents referenced a spectrum of engagement, but interchangeably used the words 'form' and 'level' to define engagement at each interval on the spectrum. As shown in Figure 4.1, 'level' could refer to:

- (1) increasing level of potential for public influence on a decision or
- (2) increasing levels of both the potential for public influence and the value of engagement itself

There was agreement between documents that moving across an engagement spectrum from inform to empower indicates a greater potential for public influence on a decision. However, the documents varied on their stance of whether moving across a spectrum also represented "better," more valuable and meaningful forms of engagement.

NEUTRAL VS HIERARCHICAL SPECTRUMS OF ENGAGEMENT

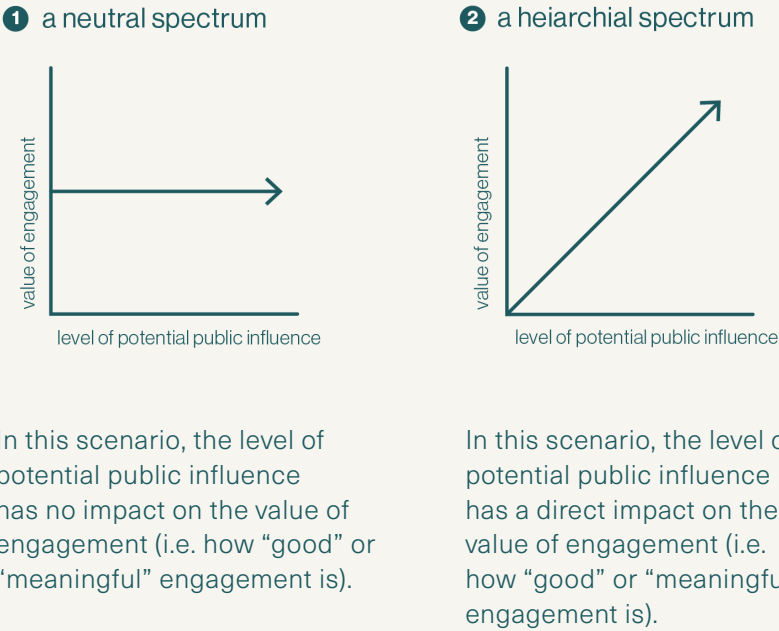


Figure 4.1 Neutral vs. Hierarchical Spectrums of Engagement (Siler 2023)

The *EPA Public Participation Guide* takes a more neutral position and notes that “there is no “right” level of public participation” (EPA 2011, 20). The potential for public influence on a decision may be impacted or determined by the organizer’s “willingness and ability to share power” and the community’s “desire and need” to participate (EPA 2011, 21). Though the document notes that most meaningful public participation occurs within the middle three levels—consult, involve, and collaborate—it doesn’t imply a sense of hierarchy between the three.

Of all the documents, *Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement* takes the strongest position on which level of engagement is “best.” Under the subtitle: When is Participatory Decision Making Best?, the document outlines three considerations for when higher levels of engagement should be employed:

- “a decision will have a significant impact on a community
- the impacted communities have faced historic or ongoing marginalization, discrimination or oppression
- there exists a significant imbalance in power and equity leading to communities being excluded from decision-making and leadership” (SFU 2020, 9).

While *Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement* acknowledges that “all forms of participation are valuable in different contexts,” the guide is “designed to inform participatory and collaborative engagement processes that aim to increase the public’s impact on the decision” (SFU 2020, 9). The document emphasizes the processes that allow for power sharing and co-creation, representative of the collaborate and empower levels on the IAP2 spectrum (IAP2 n.d.).

All documents, however, agree that it is important to be transparent about the potential level of public influence on the outcomes of a decision, and that overpromising the level of potential influence may hinder relationships and jeopardize the success of engagement.

4.3 Principles & Values

Each document identified a set of core values to guide engagement processes. The values described in the *EPA Public Participation Guide* and *Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement* were more broad and overarching principles, while those in the *NRPA Community Engagement Resource Guide* were more specific best-practices.

EPA Public Participation Guide

- “clearly define the opportunity for public influence on the decision
- commit to fully consider public input in decision-making
- engage the full range of stakeholders from the community, including vulnerable populations and marginalized communities
- build relationships between and among stakeholders
- create and share truthful, comprehensive, and clear information” (EPA 2011)

Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement

- “invite participation within an authentic and accountable process
- plan early and proactively
- establish respectful relationships with Indigenous Peoples
- engage the internal diversity of a community
- work in reciprocal relationship with community
- tailor engagement plans to the context
- commit to ongoing learning and improvement
- advance systemic equity” (SFU 2020)

NRPA's Community Engagement Resource Guide

- “consistently reiterate project goals and broader messaging
- communicate clearly and concisely
- be upfront and honest about your project expectations
- designate a point person to communicate with the community and answer questions
- provide incentives to participate
- weave in educational components
- create materials that are not only informative, but fun, attractive, and inspiring
- don't fear push back”

(NRPA 2019)

What values do the guides have in common?

Inclusion and equity were consistent values throughout the documents. *Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement* and the *NRPA Community Engagement Resource Guide* specifically applied an equity lens to engagement. It is important for engagement processes to be representative of the community *and* make a sustained effort to address systemic inequities, imbalanced power dynamics, and histories of marginalization that have excluded certain groups of people from engagement processes.

Authentic & Accountable

Tailor engagement to reflect and respond to the community.

Open Dialogue

Encourage open dialogue between community members.

Opportunity for Influence

Provide a direct opportunity for influence. Clearly communicate the opportunity for influence to the community.

Relationships

Work closely with community members from the beginning. Seek to build trust and reciprocal relationships.

Commitment to Input

Commit to listening and understanding community input and translating it to the outcomes. Be clear about how input is or is not applied.

Inclusiveness

Create an accessible and inviting engagement for all people, addressing both physical and social barriers.

Transparency

Be clear about the goals and expected outcomes of engagement. Be open and honest with community members.

Equity

Balance power dynamics and amplify voices typically left out of engagement.

4.4 Engagement Process

EPA Public Participation Guide

Of the three guides, the EPA Public Participation Guide most clearly and logically outlines the steps to planning engagement processes: The guide suggests the following steps:

- Conduct a **situation assessment** to gather information. There are two parts to a situation assessment:
 - The internal assessment should clarify the decision(s) to be made, expectations about the level of potential influence on those decisions, the potential opportunities and constraints, and the available resources for engagement.
 - The external assessment should identify the range of people who should be engaged and assess their understanding and interests related to the decision(s) to be made.
- **Organize for participation** and commit to engage the public in decision-making. Assess and assemble the necessary skills and resources to implement and facilitate engagement.
- **Identify and get to know your stakeholders** to “reach the full range of community interests throughout the project (EPA 2011, 20).
- **Pick an appropriate level of public participation** depending on the potential for public influence on a decision and the willingness to share power.
- **Integrate public participation in the decision process**, clearly communicating how input is obtained and applied to decisions.
- Once the decision process has been mapped out, **match public participation tools to objectives throughout the process.**

Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement

Rather than listing steps in the engagement process, *Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement* is organized around principles of engagement. These principles loosely follow a chronological order. Principle Two: Plan Early and Proactively includes some important considerations regarding the engagement process. A few ‘steps’ that stand out as are as follows:

- **Critically assess the project objectives** and potential constraints including timelines and necessary resources. Allow enough time to build relationships

and work in partnership with the community.

- **Research the topic and impacted communities** to “identify historic or ongoing inequities and potential barriers to participation” (SFU 2020, 22).
- **Estimate costs and dedicate resources in your budget.**
- **Involve the community in planning** and designing engagement.

NRPA Community Engagement Resource Guide

The *NRPA Community Engagement Resource Guide* lists the steps to an internal assessment and initial planning that should be completed prior to beginning engagement:

- **Assess staff capacity**, train current staff or hire specific community outreach staff.
- **Secure funding** to invest in community engagement activities and compensation for participation.
- **Build leadership support** to demonstrate the value of engagement and aid in implementation of engagement processes.
- **Create a plan with clear goals** to guide the engagement process (NRPA 2019)

What do the engagement processes have in common?

Across documents, there seems to be somewhat of a consistent process that starts with an internal assessment, assessing the potential constraints and limiting factors, and the realities of the project. The internal assessment then informs the level of potential public influence and level of engagement which both tie into the goals and objectives of engagement. During the beginning stages, there is also a need to understand the external factors, or what the NRPA describes as the “community snapshot” (NRPA 2019, 15). The documents also emphasize identifying who to engage and building relationships early on. A cycle of iteration, communication, and feedback seem to drive the rest of the process.

4.5 Implementing Engagement

EPA Public Participation Guide

The *EPA Public Participation Guide* notes the “impartial role” facilitators play to oversee group processes, manage group dynamics, moderate discussion, mediate conflicts, and “ensure all voices are heard and understood” (EPA 2011, 91).

The *EPA Public Participation Guide* describes foundational skills, knowledge, and behaviors important for those leading engagement. These skills include:

- Project Management
- Communication
- Facilitation

The role of those organizing and leading community engagement go beyond proficiency in a list of tangible skills. A sense of authenticity and genuine behaviors of those leading engagement are pivotal. The *EPA Public Participation Guide* notes, “there is no one magic skill” for success. Rather, “the right attitudes and behaviors...will go a long way” (EPA 2011, 89). The guide highlights a list of behaviors that are important to engagement:

- Transparency
- Openness
- Humility
- Respect
- Honesty
- Reliability
- Flexibility
- Resiliency

Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement

Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement highlights the value of reflection, evaluation, and sharing knowledge to contribute to a culture of openness and candidness around the failures and lessons learned from engagement. *Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement* lists skills such as:

- dedicate time for critical reflection
- curiosity

- vulnerability
- humility
- inviting uncomfortable conversations as opportunities for growth
- examine unchecked assumptions, unconscious biases, unspoken power dynamics, and individual or institutional privileges (SFU 2020, 50).

These skills are important to fostering ongoing learning and more effective and meaningful engagement processes.

NRPA Community Engagement Resource Guide

The *NRPA Community Engagement Resource Guide* lists ideal qualities of community outreach staff:

- “Ability to creatively plan, coordinate and facilitate community meetings and events
- Strong interpersonal skills, such as listening, communication and problem-solving
- Highly motivated to implement change
- Representative of the population they serve, including the language(s) spoken
- Resilient to push back and/or criticism” (NRPA 2019, 4).

This guide places more emphasis on assessing staff capacity, providing training to staff, and specifically hiring an engagement specialist.

What skills for facilitating and implementing engagement do the documents have in common?

The documents focus primarily on soft skills such as listening, communication, honesty, humility, and resilience. The documents note that these skills are beneficial when building relationships and interacting with communities during engagement activities. Though *Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement* emphasizes the importance of reflection and evaluation, the documents largely skim over skills needed for synthesizing, translating, and applying engagement findings.

4.6 Methods & Techniques

EPA Public Participation Guide

The *EPA Public Participation Guide* was the only document to thoroughly and specifically describe several tools for community engagement. The guide outlined three categories of tools:

- Tools to inform the public
- Tools to generate input
- Tools for consensus building and agreement seeking

Each category includes an overview of the tools’ purposes and uses as well as considerations for selecting and implementing the appropriate tool. Each section identifies a range of in-person and remote tools. Additional pages describe in detail the advantages, challenges, principles for successful planning, group size, necessary resources, and cost for a selection of these identified tools.

Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement

Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement doesn’t specifically list tools and techniques. Rather, the document emphasizes the importance of selecting a range of methods and “providing options for how individuals can participate based on their needs and preferences” (SFU 2020, 46). The guide suggests providing:

- “Both in-person and online engagement
- Multiple dates and locations
- Engagements in different languages
- Multiple ways to express ideas including speaking, writing, or arts-based activities
- Adaptations for activities to address barriers such as mobility, sight, hearing or literacy” (SFU 2020, 46).

NRPA Community Engagement Resource Guide

The *NRPA Community Engagement Resource Guide* focuses primarily on communication methods, rather than facilitation techniques. The guide suggests using a variety of outreach and communication methods such as:

- “Hold focus groups
- Post on social media
- Post information and updates on your website or create an interactive,

- multilingual, ADA accessible project website
- Knock on doors/visit houses
- Organize and host fun events for the community
- Attend other stakeholder/community events
- Organize and host site visits
- Conduct interviews
- Hold design charrettes
- Send personal invitations through the mail or hand deliver
- Use technology like apps and text messaging” (NRPA 2019, 16).

What strategies do the documents recommend for developing and selecting engagement methods?

Use a range of engagement methods. Implementing a variety of engagement methods and techniques allows for more diverse opportunities for participation and captures input from a wider cross-section of the community. This provides communities with options and allows individuals to choose how to participate based on their needs and preferences (SFU 2020, 46). In addition to the purpose and level of engagement, the documents emphasized considering the larger community context as well as individual needs and preferences when selecting which tools to use.

Community Context:

- community history
- community culture
- community demographics

Individual Needs

- in-person and online engagement
- multiple dates and locations
- multiple languages
- multiple ways of communicating
- multiple ways of expressing ideas

Adapt existing engagement methods. *Beyond Engagement: Equity in Public Engagement* brings up a discussion about “consultation fatigue” emphasizing the importance of understanding a community’s history with engagement initiatives—In what ways has the community been engaged in the past? Were

they effective of ineffective? What were the promised and actual outcomes?

The documents also acknowledge the shortcomings of traditional engagement techniques such as the public meeting. Though widely used and perhaps the most common form of engagement, public meetings are not always effective.

Innovate new engagement methods. In addition, the documents noted the importance of adapting engagement strategies during the engagement process—responding to feedback from the community as it comes up What worked? What didn’t and why? The lack of participation, input, or feedback may also be a sign that a new approach is needed. The perfect and most effective engagement tool may need to be created—“something new and personalized”—rather than pulled from an existing toolbox (NRPA 2019, 16).

4.7 Outcomes, Impacts & Advocacy

EPA Public Participation Guide

The *EPA Public Participation Guide* describes two primary benefits of meaningful engagement:

- “1. Sponsor agencies will make better and more easily implementable decisions that reflect public interests and values and are better understood by the public
- 2. Communities develop long-term capacity to solve and manage challenging social issues, often overcoming longstanding differences and misunderstandings” (EPA 2011, 4)

The guide recognizes that the benefits of engagement extend beyond the outcomes of the final decisions to also build community capacity. By fostering relationships between community members, improving collaboration, and providing communities with the knowledge and skills to address difficult decisions, problem solve, and resolve disputes (EPA 2011, 4). The guide also notes that by participating in engagement, communities grow their participation capacity, allowing them to become more involved and engaged in future decision-making.

Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement

Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement lists four main benefits of engagement:

- More innovative ideas
- Better decisions
- Greater public support of outcomes
- Stronger democracies

The guide mentions “support[ing] capacity-building opportunities so that community members can take the lead in organizing and delivering the engagement. Recognize different ways of leading!” (SFU 2020, 42).

NRPA Community Engagement Resource Guide

The *NRPA Community Engagement Resource Guide* includes a more extensive list of benefits of equitable engagement, some of which pertain specifically to parks and open space:

- “Build trust among community members and park and recreation agencies
 - Strengthen community capacity including via civic participation engagement and workforce development skills (e.g. voting, volunteering and park maintenance and stewardship)
 - Ensure that parks and funding are distributed more equitably across jurisdictions
 - Develop a community’s sense of ownership over park spaces
 - Decrease the prevalence of unforeseen conflicts or problems
 - Create higher-performing public parks that are reflective of communities
 - Improve the environmental, physical, social and economic health of communities
 - Increase community participation in parks and public spaces”
- (NRPA 2019, 3).

Due to its focus on engagement for public park projects, the *NRPA Community Engagement Resource Guide* dedicates more space to the later stages of engagement. Unlike the other documents, the *NRPA Community Engagement Resource Guide* focuses more on the implementation and outcomes of decisions.

Overall Document Analysis Takeaways

The existing guides focused more on the *what* of engagement—theory and overarching values—than the *how*—practical and logistical details. In tandem with defining engagement, the guides presented a thorough discussion about the spectrum of engagement. Additionally, the guides thoroughly discussed values such as inclusion, equity, trust, and transparency and big ideas such as relationship building and communication.

With a few exceptions, the existing guides skimmed over the smaller logistical details and procedural aspects of engagement such as working with clients, developing proposals and contracts, and assessing fees.

Furthermore, because the existing guides were not written through the lens of landscape architecture, they did not connect engagement to the planning and design process nor planning and design outcomes. Therefore, there was less emphasis on creating engagement tools, collecting engagement findings, synthesizing data, and translating findings to inform or shape planning and design outcomes.

Interview Findings

Interview Participants

Interview Findings

- 5.1 A Shift in Practice
- 5.2 Engagement Approaches
- 5.3 Engagement Processes
- 5.4 Origins of a Project
- 5.5 Proposals, Scopes & Contracts
- 5.6 Gathering & Synthesizing Findings
- 5.7 Applying Findings
- 5.8 Feedback
- 5.9 Skills
- 5.10 Impacts & Advocacy

Overall Interview Takeaways

Connection to Outcomes

Putting it All Together

Interview Participants

Twelve interviews were conducted with practitioners from landscape architecture firms and organizations across the United States. Though the firms and organizations vary in terms of size, services, business models, etc., each perspective added depth and diversity to the findings. For example, there were differences in how practitioners at a large multidisciplinary firm and practitioners at a small non-profit firm planned and implemented community engagement processes. Moreover, the diversity of firms provided an understanding of how community engagement can be adapted to fit a variety of contexts (i.e. geographic region, public vs. private clients, type and size of projects, etc.).

SELECTED INTERVIEWEE FIRMS

- | | |
|---|---|
| 01 Mithun
<i>Seattle, WA</i> | 07 SCAPE
<i>New Orleans, LA</i> |
| 02 KDI
<i>Los Angeles, CA</i> | 08 University of Virginia
<i>Charlottesville, VA</i> |
| 03 City Fabrick
<i>Long Beach, CA</i> | 09 Land Collective
<i>Philadelphia, PA</i> |
| 04 Sasaki
<i>Denver, CO</i> | 10 OLIN
<i>Philadelphia, PA</i> |
| 05 Dig Studio
<i>Denver, CO</i> | 11 Agency
<i>Boston, MA</i> |
| 06 Livable Cities Studio
<i>Denver, CO</i> | 12 WIP Collaborative
<i>New York, NY</i> |

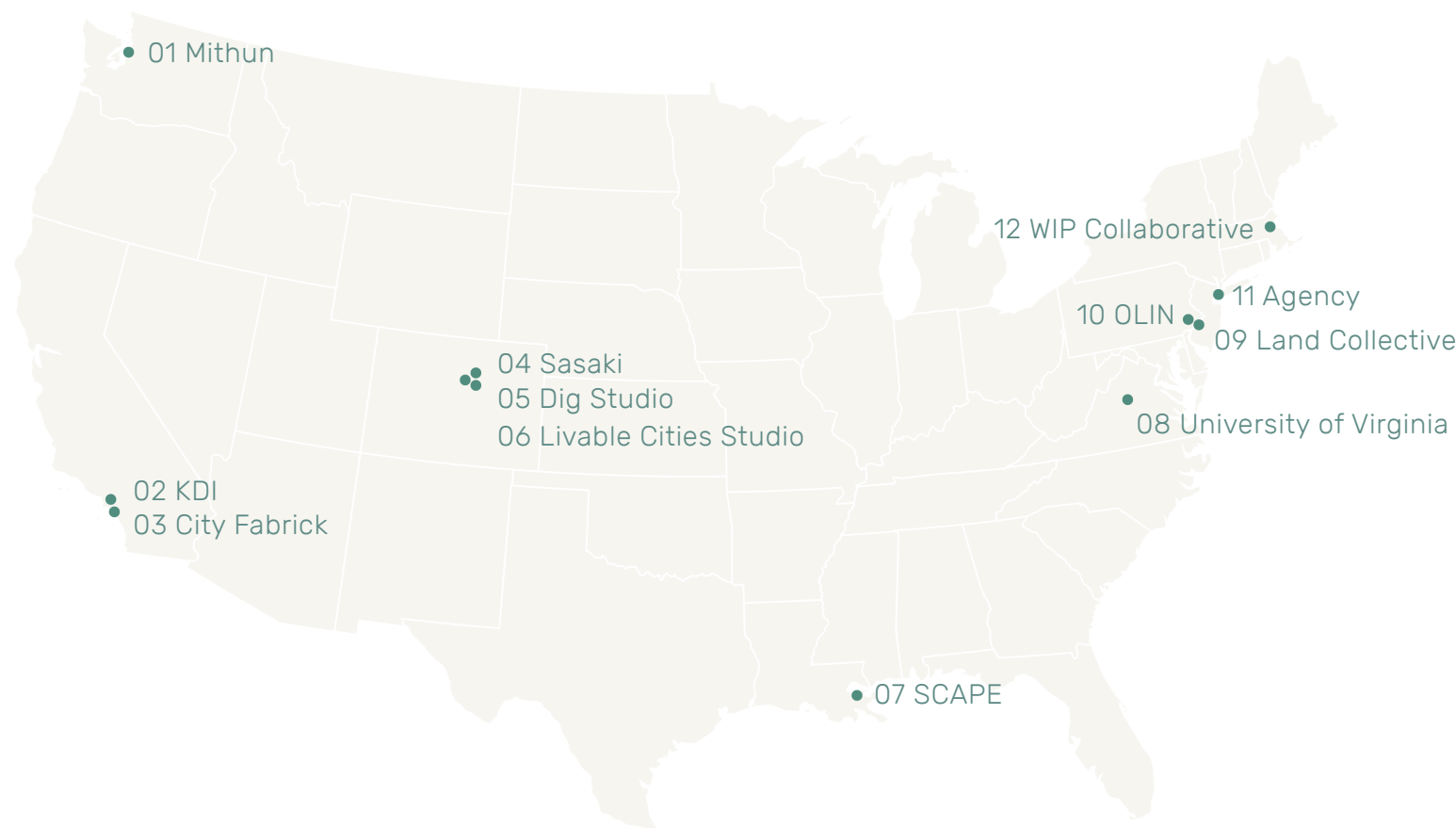


Figure 5.1 Interview Participant Firms (Siler 2023)

Interview Participants (cont.)

Seven interviewees were founders, partners, principals, or directors. Five were designers or mid-level landscape architects. One interviewee was an associate professor in landscape architecture. This range captured a breadth of experience, from founders who market their services, to project managers who write proposals and scopes, to designers who create engagement materials and sift through engagement findings.

Interviewees mostly answered the questions from their point of view at their current firm/institution or from a recent project. However, questions also sought to understand interviewees’ perspectives and experiences more broadly, allowing them to consider and draw on previous community engagement experiences as well.

DAVID RUBIN

*founder, principal,
landscape architect*
Land Collective

KAEDE POLKINGHORNE

landscape designer
SCAPE

SONYA GIMON

landscape designer
WIP Collaborative

MEREDITH WENSKOSKI

*founder, president,
landscape architect*
Livable Cities Studio

KELLY FINKOWSKI

& WILL COLEMAN

landscape architects
Dig Studio

DARRELL CAMPANA

associate, landscape architect
OLIN

LAUREN ELACHI

*senior design principal,
landscape architect*
Kounkuey Design Initiative

BRIAN ULASZEWSKI

executive director, principal
City Fabrick

ANNA CAWRSE

*director, principal,
landscape architect*
Sasaki

C.L. BOHANNON

associate professor
University of Virginia

DEB GUENTHER

partner, landscape architect
Mithun

BRIE HENSOLD

*co-founder, principal,
urban planner*
Agency

Interview Findings

The interview questions elicited rich and detailed discussion about community engagement processes within landscape architecture practice. While still connected to the four initial categories of the interview question framework, the interview findings were grouped into ten new sub-categories shown in the outline to the right. The new sub-categories represent common themes, such as community engagement trends, benefits, challenges, and processes, that emerged while synthesizing interview findings. In an effort to address the gaps in existing published guides, these sub-categories include more detailed discussions about interview findings that are specific to landscape architecture. The following pages elaborate on the specific findings within each of the ten sub-categories. The analysis includes direct quotes from interviewees as well as synthesis across all interviews.

<i>initial interview question framework</i>	<i>interview findings</i>
NATURE & EVOLUTION OF ENGAGEMENT	5.1 A Shift in Practice • Towards Meaningful Engagement • Beyond “Checking Boxes” • Responding to Sociopolitical Climates • Changes on the Client Side
APPROACH & PROCESS	5.2 Engagement Approaches • The Guideline Dilemma 5.3 Engagement Processes • From Broad to Narrow • Listen First • An Iterative and Cyclical Process 5.4 Origins of a Project • Traditional top-down approach • Bottom-up approach 5.5 Proposals, Scopes & Contracts • Getting Client Buy-In • Assessing RFQs and RFPs • Project Scopes • Building the Project Team
IMPLEMENTING ENGAGEMENT	5.6 Gathering & Synthesizing Findings • Asking Questions • Engagement Tools • Transcribing Data 5.7 Applying Findings • Representing Findings 5.8 Feedback • Feedback Loops • Adding to a Bank of Engagement Findings 5.9 Skills • Soft Skills • Logistical/Technical Skills
OUTCOMES, IMPACTS & ADVOCACY	5.10 Impacts & Advocacy • Community Building • Knowledge Sharing & Skill Building • Civic Engagement • The Power of Landscape Architecture • Room to Grow

5.1 A Shift in Practice

When asked to describe changes interviewees have seen related to community engagement within landscape architecture practice, the interviewees overwhelmingly described a noticeable shift towards more meaningful and authentic engagement.

A few interviewees started by recalling the history of engagement within public planning and design projects, noting that “it’s always been there” (Cawrse 2023) and “it’s always been important” (Finkowski 2023). Sonya Gimon, a landscape designer and founding member of WIP Collaborative, specifically discussed the history of advocacy within community design centers (CDCs), which “laid the foundation” for the way engagement is practiced in the field of landscape architecture today (2023). “There’s a lot of history of community engagement [that] might not have always been called community engagement,” Gimon explains (2023). Several interviewees also acknowledged the policies and mandates that have historically (and continue to) require a level of engagement.

There was, though, an overwhelming consensus on the recent shift within landscape architecture practice towards more meaningful and authentic engagement. Lauren Elachi, senior design principal at Kounkuey Design Initiative (KDI), notes that this shift isn’t “being brought about in a purely aesthetic way” (2023). It goes beyond simply precluding engagement with the words ‘authentic’ and ‘meaningful’—words that have almost adopted a buzzword quality in the realm of engagement—but truly reflecting on what these words mean and how they impact engagement.

Towards Meaningful Engagement

A few interviewees noted that the shift towards meaningful engagement is reflected in the way that landscape architects measure the success of engagement. “For a time, people measured success [of engagement] by a high number of touchpoints, not necessarily by the quality of engagement” explains Brie Hensold, co-founder and principal urban planner at Agency Landscape + Planning (2023). Now, more emphasis is being placed on quality rather quantity. Interviewees assessed the quality of engagement by asking is it actually “engaging for people?” (Elachi 2023). Is it authentic? Is it “from the community?” (Wenskoski 2023). Is it inclusive and equitable? Does it lift up “voices that are often left out?” (Hensold 2023). Is it meaningful? Does it capture “content that can drive outcomes?” (Hensold 2023).

**“It's becoming less
of a box to check and
more of a constant
thread that really goes
through the life cycle of
a design project”**

— Will Coleman (2023)

Beyond “Checking Boxes”

Engagement has often been treated as a “box to check” –a halfhearted ‘one and done’ to fulfill a requirement set by a municipality. Almost all interviewees described the recent shift in practice as moving away from the “check the box” mentality. Though the laws and regulations requiring public input have been in place for a while, “the way that designers are interpreting them is changing” explains Kaede Polkinghorne, designer at SCAPE (2023).

Responding to Sociopolitical Contexts

Within the planning and design fields, awareness of the importance of engagement has increased, especially within the past several years, which have been marked by tumultuous politics and a resurgence of social equity movements. With nods towards Black Lives Matter and the Covid-19 pandemic, the interviewees discussed how the field of landscape architecture has responded to wider sociopolitical contexts. “I have seen a very noticeable shift particularly post-George Floyd’s murder in how we [landscape architects] can really be thinking about community engagement” says Elachi (2023). In response to calls for more democratic design and equitable outcomes as well as a recognized need for more transparency, openness, and collaboration in the design process, landscape architects have started to rethink how engagement can be woven into the design process.

Changes on the Client Side

The emphasis on meaningful engagement that goes beyond mandated requirements is starting to reach the municipal level as well. Local, city, state, and even federal governments are beginning to recognize the value engagement brings to planning and design projects and are providing more clear outlines for engagement in Request for Qualifications (RFQs) and Request for Proposals (RFPs). Several interviewees noted changes they’re seeing on the client side, with engagement becoming a more robust requirement “as part of the funding [clients] provide” (Ulaszewski 2023). However, several interviewees, such as Darrell Campana of OLIN, also noted that there is still a lack of awareness, especially among the private clients, about not only the value of engagement, but the time and resources required for truly meaningful engagement (2023).

5.2 Engagement Approaches

When asked if their firm had a defined or formalized approach to engagement, such as a set of guidelines or series of steps that they referenced from project to project, interviewees had a range of responses. Some noted that their firms have developed internal documents to help define and guide their engagement process. For example, SCAPE has a robust suite of literature that defines their engagement approach and philosophy and describes specific projects with an engagement component (Polkinghorne 2023). Some interviewees noted that their firms have started to or are in the process of developing something similar.

EXAMPLES OF INTERNAL DOCUMENTS DESCRIBED BY INTERVIEWEES



Documents ranged in their degree of specificity. Some were more broad and overarching engagement philosophies whereas others were very specific engagement toolboxes and checklists.

Figure 5.2 Range of Firm Literature on Engagement (Siler 2023)

Other interviewees noted that, while they were unsure if their firms had an internal document or guide on engagement, they relied primarily on prior experience and precedent within the firm’s portfolio to guide their engagement process.

“We keep toying with this idea of ‘Should we put together a toolkit or a set of guidelines?’ But then it feels like it’s only sort of distilling one piece of the engagement process that could be used across the board, and we don’t want that to be misconstrued as like ‘Well if we do this, you’ve engaged the community’ ”

— Lauren Elachi (2023)

The Guideline Dilemma

Several interviewees’ weighed the pros and cons of having a defined and formalized approach to engagement such as a written set of guidelines. This revealed an internal conflict within landscape architecture practice between the value and the drawbacks of guidelines. “It’s a tricky line to walk,” says Elachi, reflecting on the balance between providing some clarity and direction “so you know where to start” without distilling and oversimplifying the intricacies of the process (2023).

The Value of Engagement Guidelines | PROS

- An overarching mission, philosophy, or framework for engagement allows firms to **stay true to their core values**. This statement of core values grounds the engagement process and serves as a standard to weigh engagement decisions against.
- Guidelines provide **a place to start**.
- Engagement is often woven into the formalized design process; “there’s only so many ways to slice that process” (Elachi 2023). Guidelines start to capture that process and **provide some consistency across projects**.

The Drawbacks of Engagement Guidelines | CONS

- **Every project is different, and every community is different** warranting a unique and tailored approach to engagement. This dynamic and responsive nature of engagement is hard to capture in a static set of guidelines.
- Guidelines can **hinder or inhibit the flexibility and adaptability** of engagement.
- Guidelines risk **sterilizing and standardizing** the engagement process.

Overall, there was a hesitancy expressed by interviewees towards relying solely on guides. Most interviewees tended to land somewhere in the middle: striving to define values and create consistency without standardizing and stripping the process of meaning and adaptability.

5.3 Engagement Processes

Several interviewees described a similar engagement process that they typically follow from project to project. Among the interviewees who described their community engagement processes in detail, there were three common themes found across their processes:

(1) The engagement process starts broad then narrows.

The engagement process typically starts with the design team trying to capture a very broad understanding of the project, place, and community. Then, through a process of discovery and active listening, the design team begins to learn about the community's identity, passions, and pain points (Cawrse 2023). Further visioning starts to reveal issues, opportunities, and community priorities. David Rubin, founding principal of Land Collective, compared the process to “a big, broad arrow that gets narrower and narrower through the engagement process until it's a refined line of alignment” (2023).

(2) Listen before you design.

Several interviewees mentioned the first thing they do in the community engagement process is listen, setting aside any preconceived notions of how the process should go or what the final project or design outcomes should be. Listening can take time. When describing one of Agency Landscape + Planning's projects, Brie Hensold spoke about the pace of the design process related to engagement, noted that “they held back on drawing the physical plan until about two-thirds of the way through [the project]” (2023). This allowed the design team more time to listen to the community's goals, values, and vision for the project.

(3) The engagement process is iterative and cyclical.

Several interviewees described a repetitive process of refinement: “putting something out in the world, getting some feedback, editing your design, putting it out back in the world, getting feedback, editing your design” (Gimon 2023). They stressed the importance of feedback loops—“what we heard” reports that represent engagement findings to the community to double check and verify that their input is accurately reflected.

5.4 Origins of a Project

The origins of a project—how it came about—greatly impacted the community engagement process. Interviewees described two main types of project origins:

(1) The more traditional, top-down approach

Projects come from a client. In this case, firms are responding to requests for proposals issued by a client.

This approach is more typical among larger, more commercialized landscape architecture firms who work in a variety of locations.

(2) The bottom-up approach

Projects come from partnerships between communities and landscape architects. In this case, either the community or landscape architects identify a potential project and bring it to a client.

This approach is more typical among smaller, hyper-local firms (such as non-profits and Community Design Centers) who have established roots and long relationships within one location.

Deb Guenther, a landscape architect and partner at Mithun, compares these two process: “Historically, we [landscape architects] have always seen the community as someone we're serving, rather than another patron. I think that's a really core difference [between then and now]...In this future scenario that is evolving...the community is our patron. They're our client. They have the money and resources to hire us. And I think that changes the power dynamic” (2023). The bottom-up approach is more relational and emphasizes fostering long-term relationships built on trust. This type of approach also, as Guenther suggested, has the potential to be more equitable than a top-down approach because it equalizes the power imbalance between designers (typically seen as experts to identify and solve a problem) and communities (typically seen as sources of information) and instead positions communities as equal partners in a design project.

5.5 Proposals, Scopes & Contracts

Getting Client Buy-In

When asked about how engagement is incorporated into project proposals, scopes, and contracts, the interviewees discussed client's role in influencing how engagement is outlined in proposals and contracts. Though some interviewees noted that engagement requirements in RFQs and RFPs are becoming more robust, other interviewees still noted challenges of working with clients who don't recognize or understand the value of engagement. In other words, some clients may not recognize the value that engagement can bring to a project, therefore limiting the budget and timeline that design teams can devote to doing meaningful engagement. Many interviewees described a dialogue with clients to "gauge the client's intention and commitment to community engagement" and align goals and expectations for the project (Polkinghorne 2023).

Several interviewees highlighted the role of the landscape architects to bring awareness to and educate clients on the value of community engagement. Brian Ulaszewski, executive director at City Fabrick, explained "there isn't enough... appreciation for the cost that it [engagement] takes" (2023). Interviewees described not only educating clients on the cost (in money, time, and resources) but also explaining the return on investment—that with a little upfront investment, engagement makes for a smoother, less expensive process and results in a design that is more economically and socially resilient (Rubin 2023).

Assessing RFQs and RFPs for Engagement

A few interviewees specifically noted that their firms selectively go after projects that align with their values of meaningful engagement, indicating that there is a level of filtering by engagement potential before even entering the proposal and contract stage. In what David Rubin describes as an "interesting faux pas," Land Collective "only allows [themselves] to be hired by clients...who recognize the value of engagement within the communities they intend to serve" (2023)

Project Scopes

The level of detail to which engagement is written into project scopes depends on several factors such context, client, budget, timeline, and project type. Interviewees explained that during the proposal and contract stages, they created a high-level overview plan that includes goals and major milestones, identified the level and amount of engagement, and sometimes even the type and number of engagement touchpoints.

Will Coleman of Dig Studio explained, "sometimes it's kind of taking a stab at it" (2023). Sometimes it's a guessing game of first assessing what the big picture goals are and what level of engagement is warranted or necessary to achieve those goals. This "first stab" gets further refined through conversations with the client (Coleman 2023).

The details of engagement and how its facilitated, however, are typically left undefined in the scope to allow room for flexibility and adaptability from project to project and community to community (Wenskoski 2023). As the project progresses there is another level of fine-grained planning where engagements begin to become clearer and more detailed.

"We have to define it enough so we can put hours to it, but leave it flexible in other areas"

— *Meredith Wenskoski (2023)*

A few interviewees described adjusting scopes and contracts to meet emerging and evolving engagement needs as the project moves forward. These included contractual "horse trading"—altering the purpose of engagements (Coleman 2023), "roll[ing] over" engagements from one phase of a project to another, or seeking ad services (Polkinghorne 2023).

Building the Project Team

Most interviewees mentioned that, when working in a location that they were not familiar with, they would rely on or partner with a local engagement consultant or community group. Local consultants bring deeper insight and a level of trust into the project.

5.6 Gathering & Synthesizing Findings

Asking Questions

Interviewees reiterated the importance of asking the right questions—questions that are relevant and applicable to the plan or design outcomes. Determining what questions to ask depends on not only the current phase of the design process, but also the overall level of engagement determined at the beginning of projects—what’s possible, what’s not? Kelly Finkowski, landscape architect at Dig Studio, explains Dig’s process of first asking “What do we want to learn from the community and how are we going to find that out?” She also considers “Is this something we can deliver on? And if not, maybe we don’t ask that question” (Finkowski 2023). Interviewees stressed the importance of always connecting questions back to the plan or design, asking “how is that [feedback] going to inform our design process or our planning process” (Polkinghorne 2023). Interviewees explained that they also always use a mix of very clear, pointed questions and open-ended questions.

Engagement Tools

The interviewees also spoke to the benefits of using a mix of engagement methods and tools to gather input from a diverse range of people to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. Many interviewees expressed that while quantitative data was more straight forward and comparatively more efficient to analyze, qualitative data added richness and depth to engagement findings, often sparking new ideas.

Transcribing Data

Interviewees noted the first step when synthesizing data is to transcribe everything and compile it all in one place. Brie Hensold described Agency’s process where they organize all the collected feedback into a spreadsheet or matrix (2023). Kaede Polkinghorne described her process at SCAPE where she first compiled everything into a Word document. Then, while reading through the feedback, she started to “identify topics that emerging as primary or priority” (Polkinghorne 2023). After identifying common themes, she grouped and reorganized feedback

into separate Word documents and wrote summary statements for each theme.

Meredith Wenskoski described Livable Cities Studio’s process of “cross tabulating” data. For example, sometimes the design team cross tabulates demographics with desires to better understand the relationships between “what people are saying, who is saying it, and why” (Wenskoski 2023).

Anna Cawrse described a method Sasaki used to layer data collected in-person and online. During an engagement event, community members identified areas of opportunity or concern by dropping pins and sticky notes on a map. “The team then...digitized that [data] and...created a layer of data within GIS.” Community members also had the opportunity to drop pins and notes on a virtual platform. The design team then used GIS to compare the qualitative data collected in-person with the quantitative data collected virtually. “The qualitative and quantitative data started overlay pretty well” explains Cawrse, “and show that there are...specific needs” (2023).

5.7 Applying Findings

Representing Findings

One strategy that some firms have developed to represent engagement findings is to use precedent images. In other words, firms search for images that are visual representations or examples of what was expressed by the community. “Probably the biggest challenge, especially a lot of projects I work on, is that we want the community sometimes to visualize something that they’ve never experienced, or they’ve never had an opportunity to experience” explained Cawrse (2023). This is where providing precedent images of examples can be very helpful. Hensold described a process of pairing a precedent image to each piece of community feedback, for instance a quote from a community member. The precedent images allow the design team to “make the leap” to design, visualizing how input could be applied or materialize in the project outcomes (Hensold 2023). Further into the design process, when presenting plan drawings and renderings for community feedback, graphic clarity and legibility is important.

A couple interviewees also described a process of creating a spectrum of design options to gauge “different levels of tolerance towards change” (Gimon 2023).

5.8 Feedback

Feedback Loops

Once community input has been collected, synthesized, distilled into common themes, and depending on the stage of the design process, applied to the design, it is important to communicate the summary of community input back to the community. Several interviewees described creating a feedback loop with communities, resharing what was heard and then how the feedback was applied to the project. Feedback loops keep the community informed and are a way to double check if design alternatives or proposed outcomes accurately reflect the priorities and ideas of the community. “We’ll usually take those themes and play them back to the community and confirm that those are the right themes and that we heard them correctly,” explains Hensold (2023).

The next step is really understanding how the feedback connects back to the plan or design at that stage in the design process. Sometimes there is a clear link between feedback and its applicability to a design. “Some of [the feedback] is actionable,” explains Ulaszewski, “and then some of it just helps to inspire (2023).

Adding to a ‘Bank’ of Engagement Findings

In some cases, engagement findings can’t be applied to a specific project due to limitations such as budget or timeline. However, the data collected during engagement processes may be applicable to future work, beyond the project it was collected for. This data can still contribute to a larger ‘bank’ of knowledge and community feedback that could be pulled from for future phases or future projects. A few interviewees described the value of compiling data and creating an ‘engagement data bank.’

Coleman described: “Sometimes feedback that you get doesn’t necessarily fall within your project scope. But being able to say, “Hey, we heard this. It’s not part of this project, but this is something that the city will keep track of moving forward, and you know, could be a...very good project down the road,” (2023).

Ulaszewski described: “Even if [the feedback] is not exactly relevant to that conversation, you can still document it, and incorporate into something that you know might come up later. We’ve done that—we’ve been doing that quite a bit with a lot of our work recently” (2023).

5.9 Skills

Soft Skills

The interviewees primarily emphasized soft skills that were valuable to planning, developing, and leading engagement processes.

Several interviewees mentioned the importance of self-awareness. In order to understand the biases the designer brings to the engagement process, it is important that they reflect on who they are and where they’re from explains C.L. Bohannon, professor at the University of Virginia (2023). Along with this, it is important to consider the community’s perspective—their identify and where they’re coming from. This process of reflection and awareness requires a level of vulnerability and empathy (Rubin 2023).

Active listening was another soft skill that almost all interviewees mentioned as essential for doing community engagement work. Active listening includes “enabling the community to really feel heard” (Finkowski 2023). Oftentimes this involves seeking out the voices of marginalized or silenced communities. Bohannon explains, “Oftentimes the transformational qualities of engagement is the fact that someone is actually sitting down and listening to someone else. So often marginalized communities have been erased...so doing this work opens up dialogue” (Bohannon 2023).

Recognizing that communities have a story to tell and weaving those narratives into the engagement and design process is also a valuable skill for designers.

Several interviewees also emphasized the importance of communication. Written communication aids in proposal and scope writing. Verbal communication aids in public presentations and one-on-one conversations with community members. Verbal communication skills are also important to facilitate and moderate productive dialogue, particularly in tense situations where conflict may arise. Cawrse explains that this sometimes involves “trying to tease out what it is that is upsetting or frustrating” to a community member and “reframing the question” in a new way (2023). Wenskoski also suggests “thinking through what is the hardest question [you] could get...What’s the one question you don’t want to get and figure out how to answer it” (2023). Graphic communication skills also help explain complex ideas efficiently and effectively.

Logistical / Technical Skills

A few interviewees also discussed the logistical skills needed to successfully plan and facilitate an engagement event. “There is no detail too small” stresses Hensold, meaning that being organized and thinking through all the details is essential. This may include understanding the layout and orientation of the physical engagement space—Where will people gather? Where will people sit? How will people move through the space? Where are the outlets? (Hensold 2023). Often an engagement event requires a team effort with assigned roles and responsibilities for all the team members involved. Some interviewees also mentioned the use of engagement checklists to organize all the small details (i.e. a supplies list) and prime team members on their roles and responsibilities (Gimon 2023; Hensold 2023).

5.10 Impacts & Advocacy

Community Building

When asked to discuss how community engagement can contribute to community building, interviewees mentioned outcomes of engagement that extended beyond the scope of the plan or design. Engagement has the potential to build community capacity through knowledge sharing and skill building. It also contributes to a sense of agency and self-determination within communities, showing them that they can make an impact in other aspects of their community. Several interviewees hesitated to say engagement gave people these skills. Rather, they reiterated that these skills and the potential already exists within communities.

Knowledge Sharing & Skill Building

Community engagement processes contributed to knowledge sharing and skill building that was mutually beneficial for landscape architects and communities.

Through the community engagement process, landscape architects were able to educate communities about the importance of their work. “I think so many times designers...shy away from sharing technical challenges or issues or opportunities, because we might assume the community doesn’t care or can’t understand that....There could be huge issues around contamination. There

could be huge issues around flooding. Let’s explain that to the community in the way that that they can understand, and sort of come along with you in the process as you make these changes” (Cawrse 2023). This knowledge sharing can leave communities “more empowered to both be champions for whatever [landscape architects] were working on, but ... [also] have self-determination around other things” (Ulaszewski 2023).

Civic Engagement

Community engagement process also encourage civic engagement in communities. Many interviewees described examples of a community member who became more involved in their local community, whether it be through exploring a new business venture or running for city council, because of the community engagement process (Elachi 2023; Hensold 2023; Wenskoski 2023).

A couple interviewees also noted the role landscape architects play in “connecting the dots,” facilitating relationships between local municipalities and communities and strengthening social networks that ultimately present new opportunities for partnerships. “I don’t want to say we’re teaching the community how to do things, because I think most people know how to do it. It’s just trying to help connect the dots...and then, like creating those direct like avenues between, you know, local communities and local government” says Elachi (2023). Similarly Guenther explains, “We’re connecting people...through the design process. We’re...connecting all these holistic pieces that are coming together...through these various partnerships and establishing opportunities for partnerships, just though being able to connect through the design process itself” (2023).

The Power of the Landscape Architecture Discipline

When asked if they could relay one thing about engagement to landscape architecture students and emerging professionals, the interviewees highlighted the unique role of landscape architects to lead meaningful community engagement. Landscape architects have a unique understanding of larger systems, allowing them to address complex, systemic issues.

“When you draw a line on a piece of paper, it has an effect on someone. That line has power. Inherently in our work, when we're moving lines around...there's power behind it. It has an effect.”

— C.L. Bohannon (2023)

Room to Grow

A promising thread throughout interviews was the sense of optimism towards the ability of landscape architects to use their power for good. Landscape architecture is “the most powerful discipline in the world because of [its] capacity to be equitable and service all people. It’s the least expensive thing to manipulate to serve the greatest number of people—very different than building architecture, very different than any of the other arts” explains David Rubin (2023). There is still room to improve engagement processes in the field of landscape architecture. Bohannon explains, “[Engagement] is paramount to our survival as a profession... If we do not figure out how to effectively and compassionately design for others in mind, our profession will not make it....We have to do a better job creating just and equitable spaces for people, which in turn, will hopefully create space for just and equitable futures” (Bohannon 2023).

Overall Interview Takeaways

The interviewees spoke about engagement through the lens of landscape architecture projects. They added discipline-specific details that the existing published engagement guides lacked.

The interviewees talked about the art of proposal writing and drafting project scopes that are ‘just flexible enough.’ They talked about budgets and fees, the cost of engagement, and the return on investment which can be mutually beneficial for both landscape architects and communities. They talked about working with clients who don’t always understand the value of engagement. They talked about shifting municipal requirements and advocating for more robust engagement scopes.

They spoke through the lens of a variety of project types, from transportation plans to park design. They talked about projects where community engagement sparked new ideas about recreational programming and ecological restoration. And where community engagement contributed to relationship building and community capacity.

The interviewees applied engagement to space-based issues of justice and equity and environmental concerns from floodplains to contamination.

They talked about dot voting and sticky notes. But they also talked about tools such as virtual surveys, interactive mapping, and mobile engagements. They talked about creating game boards, recording oral histories, drawing plans, and building models with the community.

They talked about valuable skills like drawing upside down and party planning. They talked about the time, energy, patience, and dedication that engagement requires. They talked about vulnerability, thick skin, and, at times, the heaviness of engagement.

They brought up real world challenges they’ve faced during engagement such as social movements that shift priorities to global pandemics that flip engagements upside down.

Most importantly, the interviewees conveyed the value of integrating engagement and design processes—of the unique position of landscape architects to weave together these processes, allowing them to speak directly to each other, rather than isolating them into two parallel, but separate, processes.



Overall Document Analysis and Interview Findings

Engagement is contextual. It takes a different form from project to project and community to community. Both the existing published guides and interviews discussed how social factors such as history, culture, and demographics as well as logistical factors, such as location, clients, budgets, and timeline can impact how engagement is planned and implemented.

Engagement exists on a spectrum. While the existing published guides were more explicit about the spectrum of engagement, clearly defining five levels, the interviewees spoke to this spectrum of engagement more indirectly. Without delineating or naming the levels of engagement, the interviewees described a range of techniques that served to either inform communities or empower communities by engaging throughout the design process.

Be transparent about what is possible. Both the existing published guides and interviewees conveyed the importance of relaying what is possible, what is not, and why—whether it be due to social, political, financial, environmental, or other limiting factors. Acknowledging the community’s input even when it isn’t or can’t be applied to the plan or design and being transparent about the reasons why, is important in building trust and understanding.

Equitable engagement. Both the existing published guides and interviewees applied an equity lens to engagement, recognizing the importance of representation and inclusion, but understanding that equitable engagement goes a step beyond that to address systemic inequities that have excluded certain groups of people from engagement.

Listen first. Both the existing published guides and interviewees emphasized the importance of active listening, of listening to understand where a community is coming from, their wants and needs, their passions and aspirations, and their pain points. Both the published guides and interviewees also elaborated on the idea of a feedback loop to communicate what was heard and respond in a way that builds mutual understanding between landscape architects and communities.

Connecting Findings to Outcomes

Figure 5.3 shows how the document analysis framework and interview question framework are connected to the phases of the engagement process, which became the framework for the six main sections of the primer. Similarly, Figure 5.4 on the following page illustrates, in more detail, how the document analysis and interview findings are connected to the eight chapters of the primer.

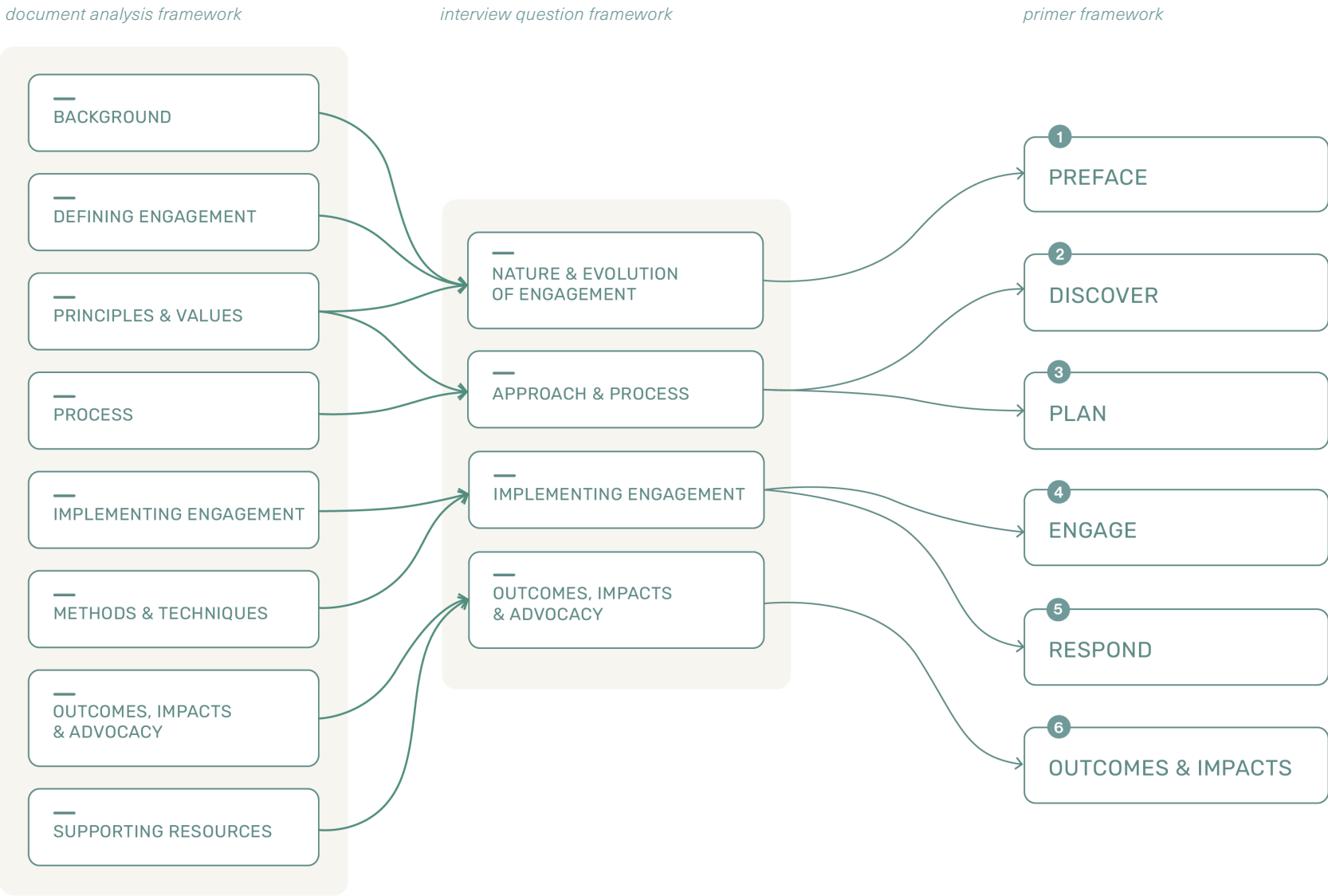


Figure 5.3 Connecting Findings to Outcomes (Siler 2023)



Engaging Communities:

a primer for
landscape architecture practice

About this Primer

Framing community engagement through the lens of landscape architecture practice, this primer explores how engagement can be integrated throughout the typical design process. It includes important considerations for developing community engagement processes within landscape architecture practice.

Additionally, this primer was informed by insights and important takeaways provided by practitioners in the field of landscape architecture. Interviews were conducted with the following practitioners and professor: David Rubin, Kaede Polkinghorne, Sonya Gimon, Meredith Wenskoski, Kelly Finkowski, Will Coleman, Darrell Campana, Lauren Elachi, Brian Ulaszewski, Anna Cawrse, C.L. Bohannon, Deb Guenther, and Brie Hensold. Their insights provided a glimpse into the thought processes, tough decisions, and labor of love that goes into each community engagement process and are an invaluable piece of this primer.

How to Use this Primer

This primer can be used as a resource for landscape architecture students and emerging professionals who not only recognize the importance of community engagement but hope to bring some of this knowledge to their future workplaces.

Engaging Communities: A Primer for Landscape Architecture Practice is organized into six sections and eight chapters.

In reality, the four phases of the community engagement process that this primer defines—discover, plan, engage, and respond—may overlap or happen in tandem with one another. Rather than being a prescriptive set of 'steps', the phases are intended to provide a framework for better understanding community engagement processes. These sections are bookended by a preface on the value of starting with a values-based approach and a conversation about engagement outcomes and impacts.

Recognizing that community engagement is dynamic and contextual, this primer is not meant to be prescriptive. Rather, it is intended to provide **somewhere to start.**

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Diverse representation that includes historically marginalized communities is essential to an equitable process and equitable outcomes. Invest time in fostering relationships built on trust and understanding.

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Key Relationships

Reciprocal Relationships

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Understanding people & place allows you to tailor engagement processes to reflect community values, needs, and priorities. Consider mapping and "field truthing" to understand geographic and place-based nuances.

Community Identity

Two Levels of Understanding

Mapping Spatial Geographies

Communication & Outreach

Meeting People Where They Are

"Field Truthing"

04

Making Promises

An important step prior to implementing engagement is to determine the amount of influence the community can have on the outcomes of planning and design decisions. The level of potential influence directly relates to the level of engagement—inform, consult, involve, collaborate, co-create, or empower—that is selected for engagement "touchpoints" throughout the project.

Your Engagement Promise

Understanding the Decision

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Select or develop tools & techniques for encouraging open and productive dialogue and encouraging communities to explore and develop design ideas and solutions. Moreover, dialogue among diverse groups of people can help communities move towards understanding and acceptance of viewpoints that are different from their own.

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Capturing Quantitative & Qualitative Data

Representing Findings

Using Data to Inform Outcomes

Making Meaning from the Findings

08

Building Resilience & Community Capacity

Outcomes from engagement can often extend beyond a final plan or design, helping to build community capacity and support self-determination and sustained local action.

Growing Participation Capacity

Ownership & Stewardship

Landscape Architects as Connectors

Sustained Local Action

"Engagement is fuel for inspired design, not a replacement for it."

—Gina Ford in *250 Things a Landscape Architect Should Know*

(Ford 2019, 62)

Why Engage?

Community members are the local experts.

Community members are intimately familiar with the issues and challenges that their communities face (Hemmerling *et al.* 2020). They are also in tune with the values and priorities of their community. It's important that landscape architects "hold very tightly to respect for people's lived experience...No amount of [design] education or experience can really stand in for that" (Polkinghorne 2023).

Community members spark new ideas.

Community members have diverse perspectives that can spark new ideas and inspire new directions in a planning or design process. "[Designers] don't have a monopoly on good ideas," explains Brian Ulazewski, director at City Fabrick. "Some of my favorite ideas are the ones that community members have brought up" (Ulazewski 2023).

Landscape architects are in a unique position to invite community members into the design process, providing opportunities for community members to not only inform planning and design decisions but to co-create planning and design outcomes. Landscape architects are also in a unique position to translate community input, ideas, and feedback into design and planning outcomes, giving form and function to community engagement findings.

Ultimately when landscape architects integrate community engagement throughout their design process, planning and design outcomes are more responsive and reflective of the community's values, needs, and priorities.

THE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

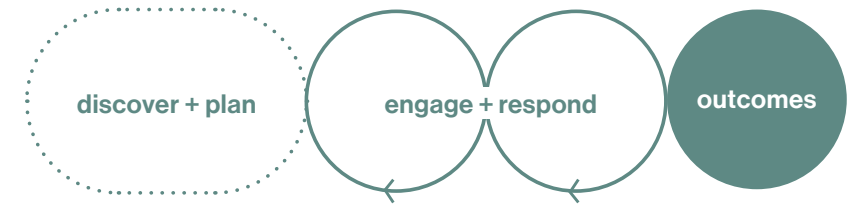


Figure 6.1 The Engagement Process (Siler 2023)

The phases of the engagement process shown in Figure 6.1 include discover, plan, engage, and respond. The engagement process starts with a broad discovery of the community and project context. The planning phase begins to narrow down and formalize engagement goals, objectives, and intended outcomes. The last two phases, engage and respond, represent an iterative and cyclical process of engaging the community, synthesizing engagement findings, and reporting them back to the community. The engage and respond phases are repeated as needed until the decisions have been finalized. These phases represent the process leading up to engagement outcomes.

PHASES OF A TYPICAL LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE DESIGN PROCESS

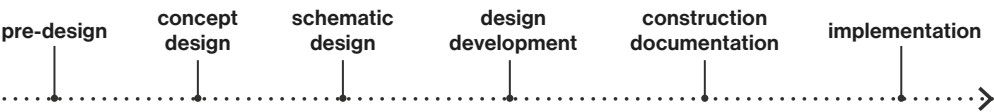


Figure 6.2 Phases of the Typical Design Process (information from Design Workshop 2016)

The typical design process in landscape architecture practice shown in Figure 6.2 includes five phases: pre-design, concept design, schematic design, design, development, and construction documentation (Design Workshop 2016). in the pre-design phase decisions are broadly centered around project scope and timeline, project goals, opportunities, and parameters, and preliminary vision and programming. During the concept and schematic design phases, decisions more narrowly assess the project site history and context, programming and design precedents, and design framework. These phases focus on big ideas to guide the programming of the project site as well as spatial organization. Plan or design alternatives are also explored during these phases. During the design development phase, plan or design alternatives are further narrowed down to select the final outcome (Design Workshop 2016).

putting the two together
INTEGRATING ENGAGEMENT THROUGHOUT THE DESIGN PROCESS

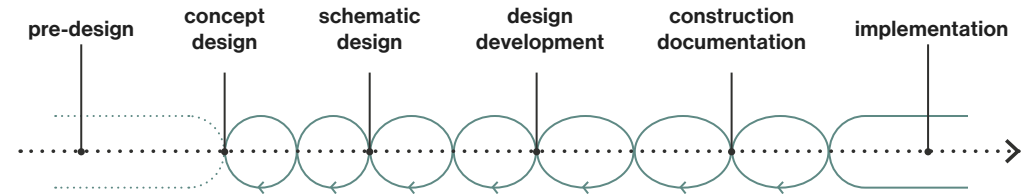


Figure 6.3 Integrating Engagement throughout the Design Process (Siler 2023)

When engagement processes are isolated from design processes (i.e. when one team is doing community engagement and a separate team is doing design), it can often be more difficult to directly connect community engagement findings to planning and design outcomes. However, when the two processes are integrated, that is, when community engagement is woven throughout each phase of the design process and the same team is working on both (as shown in Figure 6.3), community engagement findings have a greater potential to be directly connected to planning and design outcomes.

Figure 6.4 on the following page illustrates the community engagement process within landscape architecture practice. It overlays the phases of the engagement process with the phases of the typical design process. Depending on the firm model and project origins, the engagement process may follow a top-down or bottom-up approach. Additionally, depending on the purpose of engagement and, at times, the project outcome(s), engagement processes may spend more time in the discover and plan phases and in the concept and schematic design phases, before moving into more detailed design development. The two circles illustrate the cyclical and iterative process of engaging and responding. The first cycle illustrates the process during the concept and schematic design phases, where planning and design decisions are still broadly focused on visioning and programming. The second cycle moves into design development, where design alternatives begin to be narrowed down. Each cycle can be repeated as needed before transitioning to the next. While there may be nuances or intricacies to individual engagement processes that are not illustrated, Figure 6.4 is intended to provide a visual representations that aids in understanding engagement processes through the lens of landscape architecture practice.

UNDERSTANDING THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

through the lens of landscape architecture

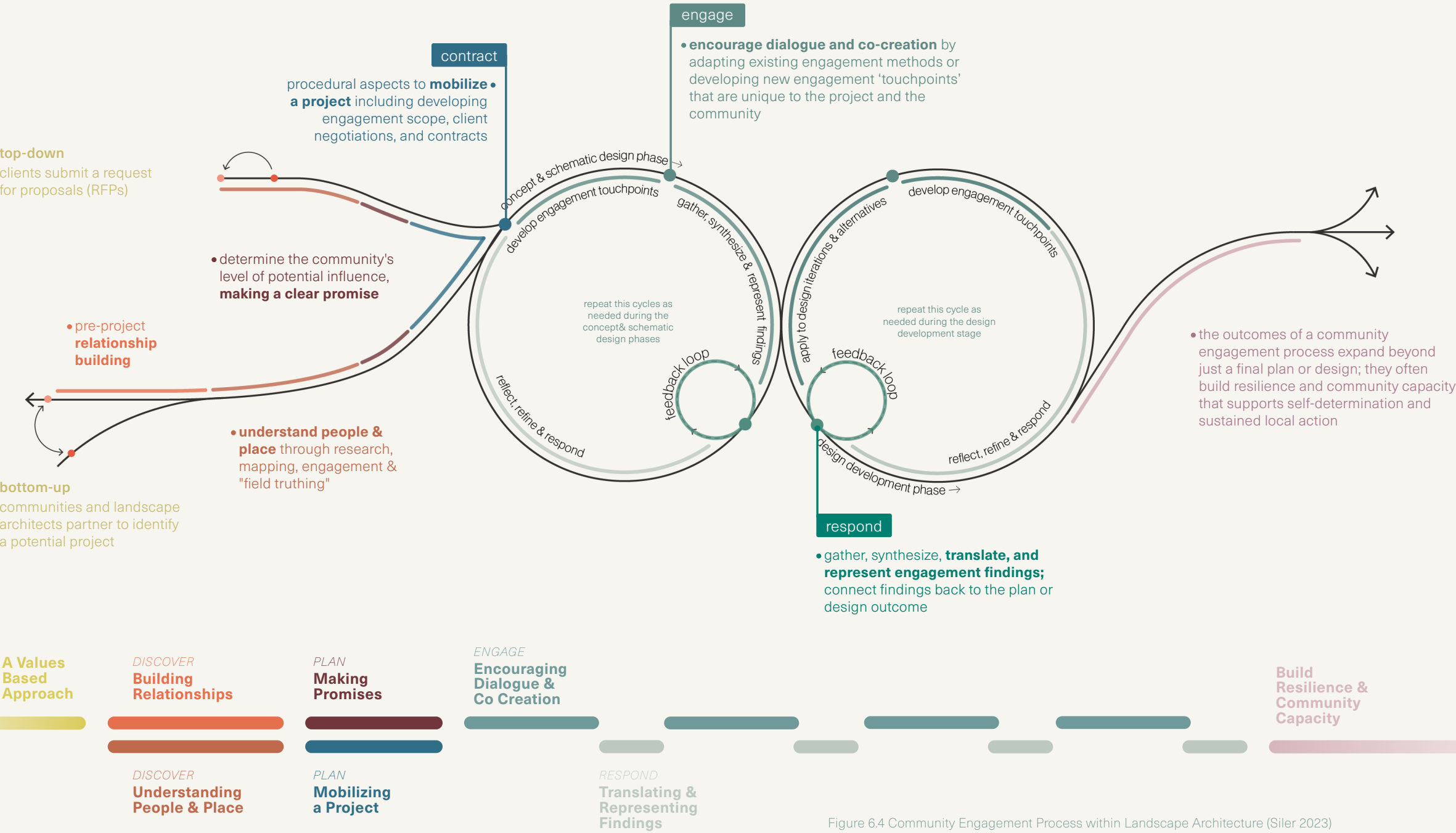


Figure 6.4 Community Engagement Process within Landscape Architecture (Siler 2023)

The phases of the community engagement process within landscape architecture correspond to the chapters of the primer shown in the color bars above.

01

A Values Based Approach

The Value of a Values Based Approach

A values-based approach is an approach to community engagement processes that is driven by values defined by both the project team and the community. These values could include: an opportunity for community influence, commitment to community input, open dialogue, transparency, trust, inclusiveness, and equity. Values provide a reference and a standard for practitioners—something to measure decisions against when planning and implementing community engagement processes.

Values also serve to ground the community engagement process. Though each community engagement process should be unique, responding to the contextual factors of the specific project and community, decisions related to the community engagement process should be grounded in a common set of core values.

Moreover, following a values-based approach can allow the project team to adapt and respond to diverse contexts. Start by defining a core set of values to guide your project. Invite the community to play a role in co-developing the values for a project as well. When defining a core set of values for your engagement process consider these questions:

Is it authentic?

is it *from* the community?

is it driven by the community?

is it responsive to community's needs and aspirations?

is it responsive to community's ideas and collective visions?

Is it equitable?

is it *with* the community?

does it give voice to those who have been marginalized?

does it share power with all community members?

does it address systemic inequities?

Is it meaningful?

is it integrated throughout the planning and design process?

does it drive the planning and design outcomes?

does it follow through on promises of cultural vitality, economic prosperity, and community resilience?

An Equity Lens

An equity lens is a useful tool, often composed of several questions, to critically assess the equitableness of both your engagement process and planning and design outcomes. Ask the following questions to apply an equity lens to your engagement process. Equitable engagement processes make an intentional effort to:



Acknowledge Bias

→ What assumptions or biases may impact the community engagement process? What efforts have been made to name biases and debias the engagement process?

Remove Barriers

→ What barriers (both physical and social) exist that prevent communities members from accessing and participating in community engagement processes? What efforts have been made to remove barriers and foster a sense of belonging?

Include Marginalized Voices

→ Who is included in the community engagement process? Whose voices are being heard and whose are not? Who will be most affected by the planning or design outcomes? What efforts have been made to ensure the engagement process is representative of the community and inclusive to all people?

Address Historical Contexts & Systemic Inequities

→ What historical injustices and/or disparities impact the project and the community? Who has historically been excluded from community engagement processes? What efforts have been made to overcome historical and existing inequities?

Share Power

→ What power structures and power imbalances exist? Who is leading and driving the community engagement process? Who prioritizes outcomes? What efforts have been made to redistribute power and democratize the community engagement? What efforts have been made to compensate communities for their participation and contributions?

(adapted from City of Baltimore n.d.; Nonprofit Advancement n.d.; Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health n.d.; Strategic Planning Development Team 2014; Multnomah County 2014)

Listen First.

Before you roll out your trace-paper and pick up a pencil, listen. Before you draw a line and before you begin to design, listen. Listen to understand, actively picking up on the passions, pain points, needs, wishes, and desires that community members share.

Active listening can be broken down into three aspects: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral (Abrahams and Groysberg 2021). Active listening involves more than just hearing. Reading body language, tone of voice, social cues or other contextual factors help you cognitively process the meaning embedded in what you’re hearing. Active listening also involves a level of emotional and behavioral responses, such as eye contact or nodding, to “convey interest and comprehension” (Abrahams and Groysberg 2021).

When listening to communities take note of common interests.

UNDERSTANDING POSITIONS VS. INTERESTS

Positions	Interests
“are what a person or group wants; they represent the demand being made” (Nabatchi & Leighninger 2015, 244)	“are the reasons—the needs, values, or concerns—underlying a position; they represent why a person or group wants something” (Nabatchi & Leighninger 2015, 244)

Nabatchi & Leighninger explain that, “for any given issue, people generally have only one position but many interests, with some interests being more important than others. Moreover, people with conflicting positions often have interests in common” (2015, 244). Focusing on common interests can help build consensus and mutual understanding.

02

Building Relationships

“start with the relational
and then follow with the
transactional”

— Deb Guenther (2023)

Relational Work

Growing trust and building relationships with communities, even before projects start, can lead to more meaningful community engagement. Relational work, explains landscape architect Deb Guenther, is not only about better engagement, but it's about better outcomes—plans and designs that “create direct benefits for residents,” reduce displacement, create stability, and invest in communities (Guenther 2022).

Many communities with histories of marginalization have experienced repeated cycles of broken promises and displacement, which erode trust. The first steps to building relationships requires understanding these histories and levels of trauma that communities have experienced.

Building relationships based on trust takes time. Allocate adequate time *before* projects start to build meaningful relationships with community members.

Relational work also requires a shift in mindsets and power structures that views communities as clients and encourages them to initiate projects.

Representation

When identifying groups of people to engage with, consider who this project will impact? Who will be directly or indirectly impacted by the decision? Are there groups of the community who have or who may be disproportionately burdened by the project? Who is already involved and engaged?

Throughout community engagement it is important to reflect on who is being engaged? Who are you hearing from? Who is being represented? Whose voices are missing or excluded?

While you should strive to make engagement representative of the community be mindful of tokenism which "occurs when efforts to enact inclusion are (or seem to be) merely symbolic: inviting only a few participants from under-represented groups to give the appearance of diversity" (SFU 2020, 37).

Key Relationships

There are two key relationships that can help to establish trust and build momentum at the beginning of the community engagement process.

First, “identify the community member that everyone knows” (Elachi 2023). This could be a long-term resident or active community member that has a large social network. Existing community organizations are also a good place to start. However, be mindful that "powerful or even widely respected organizations and leaders do not necessarily represent the interests and perspectives of all community members" (SFU 2020, 43).

Secondly, look to schools or youth programs to engage the younger population.

“Treat engagement like a *finite resource*, honoring the time and energy it requires from community”

(SFU 2020, 18)

Reciprocal Relationships

Reciprocal relationships ensure that engagement processes are mutually beneficial, not extractive. Reciprocity is not only about genuine relationships, but it also includes compensating community members for their significant investment of time and knowledge into the community engagement process.

Forms of Reciprocity

- provide meals
- provide childcare
- provide financial compensation
- skills training
- capacity building
- stimulate local economies
- public acknowledgment

03

Understanding People & Place

“making place matter also requires context and situatedness, replacing totalizing narratives with nuanced perspectives that combine historical knowledge of the *how-we-got-here* variety with close-up observations of the *here-and-now*”

— Gabrielle Esperdy

(Esperdy *et al.* 2022)

Community Identity

Each community has a unique story that has shaped not only its physical environment, but its social, emotional, and cultural identity. Uncovering and understanding a community's narratives and history can be a powerful force in shaping your community engagement process.

Two Levels of Understanding

Understanding community identity is multi-fold. It may be helpful to think of it as two levels of understanding that build upon each other: the first is a high level skim and the second is a deeper dive. The amount of depth and detail and time spent researching at each level may differ from project to project and firm to firm, depending on preexisting relationships and knowledge of the community. For instance, firms that work in a hyperlocal realm and have deep-seated relationships with community members may have more insight and understanding going into the proposal and contract stage.

01

DURING THE PROPOSAL & CONTRACT STAGE

The first level of understanding should happen alongside the planning stages, when making promises and mobilizing projects. At this stage, the understanding remains a high level, but provides enough context of the history, place, spatial geographies, and demographics to make a promise to the community and scope engagement in your contract. This first level of research most likely will happen internally with your team.

02

DURING THE EARLY PHASES OF ENGAGEMENT

The second level of understanding is when you truly begin to dive into engagement. At this stage it is important to listen to the community's perspectives, asking them to share their stories. Intimate, one-on-one interviews and meaningful conversations have the potential to uncovering hidden or forgotten narratives that may redirect your whole approach to engagement.

01 DURING THE PROPOSAL & CONTRACT STAGE

Mapping Spatial Geographies

Consider mapping to better understand broad data sets situated within a spatial, geographic context. Below are a few web-based data sets and mapping tools to get you started:

- **ArcGIS Living Atlas of the World**
access existing maps or explore the data layers to make your own
- **Policy Mapper**
access a wide range of geographic data sets such as demographics, income, housing, and health
- **Justice Map**
visualize geographic race and income data
- **National Equity Atlas**
access a detailed "report card" on racial and economic equity
- **EJ Screen**
visualize environmental and demographic socioeconomic indicators to screen for environmental justice concerns
- **Trust for Public Lands Park Score**
compare a city's ParkScore Index that measures park acreage, investment, amenities, access, and equity
- **EPA Smart Location Database**
access geographic data measuring location efficiency through indicators such as density, diversity of land use, and transit service
- **National Walkability Index**
access geographic data measuring walkability

Using these tools and others can reveal various physical and social inequities that exist within a community's fabric and built environment. Where are there spatial inequities? Are there issues of park access? Are there urban heat islands? Are there food deserts? Are there environmental threats to health and wellbeing? Where are there "absences and voids?" (Bohannon 2023). Pay attention to the disparities present in the community, the historic or contemporary causes of these inequities, and the barriers they create for community members. Consider how your engagement process will address these barriers and specifically include voices from marginalized and underrepresented communities to ensure the process is equitable and democratic.

02 DURING THE EARLY PHASES OF ENGAGEMENT

Communication & Outreach

Understanding how communities communicate is critical to outreach and engagement efforts. The project team should seek advice from local community groups or organizations to understand the common and effective modes of communication for a particular community. Make an intentional effort to seek out avenues that reach underrepresented voices, which may include developing materials in multiple languages and hiring professional interpreters. Reaching a diverse audience through effective communication is key to initiating early conversations with community members.

Consider if your communication methods are accessible for:

- “people with lower levels of literacy
- people who are deaf or hard of hearing
- people who are blind/low vision
- people with speech impairments
- people who are not proficient (reading, writing, listening or speaking) in the dominant language” (SFU 2020, 64).

Meeting People Where They Are

Meeting people where they are involves some on the ground work, getting out into the community, meeting with people, and having one-on-one conversations. Start by having conversations with the client, consultants or community leaders about “the opportune moments or key places where [you] can find people” (Hensold 2023). This may be annual festivals or local events or common hangout and gathering places. Seek out opportunities where engagement activities can support or enhance an existing event, rather than detract from it.

"Field Truthing"

As described by landscape architecture professor C.L. Bohannon, "field truthing" involves visiting a community to observe and interact with community members on-site. Ideally, the entire project team should visit the project site and spend time in the community. As Bohannon explains, "field truthing" allows you to check any prior assumptions you had about a place (2023).

Data and mapping, while powerful, cannot replace conversations with community members who can speak to the lived experience of a place. Consider how you can incorporate "field truthing" into your community engagement process to better understand the relationships between people and place.

Utilize some of the following methods to "field truth" your initial research:

- Go on a walking tour with a local
- One-on-one interviews with a local
- Informal Porch talks
- Oral history interviews
- Talk to local business owners
- Learn about local trades
- Learn about local culture
- Attend community events or festivals
- Visit public parks, libraries, cafes, religious organizations, or other communal spaces

04

Making Promises

“Promise only what you believe you can deliver.

Deliver what you have promised.

Demonstrate what you deliver by communicating effectively.”

(EPA 2011, 6)

Your Engagement Promise



Community engagement represents a promise to the community—a promise that community input has the potential to influence a project's outcomes. The degree to which the public can influence a project's outcomes directly relates to the level of engagement (often illustrated on an engagement spectrum). Clear promises help to clarify the community's expectations about their potential influence. “Without clear promises, the public will interpret a wide range of expectations, most of which are not intended and cannot be met” (EPA 2011, 6). Communities invest their time and knowledge into engagement and design processes. Overpromising can undermine the engagement process. If communities are continually overpromised and underdelivered—in other words if they can't see the impacts of their investment—they may start to lose trust in the process and be less likely to reinvest their time and knowledge into future processes.

Understanding the Decision

In landscape architecture practice, each phase of the planning and design process involves a variety of decisions to make—everything from land-use to programming down to paving materials and plant selection. These decisions address what the vision of a place will be, what the experience will be like, what will happen there, and what it will look like. Such decisions can also influence a project's environmental and social impacts.

Understanding Internal Parameters

Budgets, fees, staffing capacity, and project timelines are all internal parameters on planning and design projects. Understanding the parameters on planning and design decision-making allows the project team to make an informed decision about the level of public engagement. By knowing what is logistically possible, the project team can be more transparent in communicating to communities what role they will play and the level of influence they may have during the engagement process.

Transparency & Clear Communication

Throughout the community engagement process it is important to be transparent about where and how the community's input and ideas are being applied to the project outcomes. There should be a clear line of reasoning from the project team between “we heard this” so “we did this.” It is also important for the project team to remain transparent about input that wasn't applied to the project outcomes and to provide an explanation why. Clear communication helps to manage expectations and build mutual understanding, even when input isn't reflected in the final project outcomes. It affirms that the community's voices were heard and valued.

Determining the Level of Engagement

It is important to understand which planning and design decisions the community can influence and which are outside of the project team's control or beyond the scope of the project. During each stage of the planning and design process, ask yourself **what is the potential for public influence here?** The answer to this question influences the level of engagement warranted at each stage of the process.

The Engagement Spectrum Adapted for Landscape Architecture Practice in Figures 6.5 and 6.6 is a guide that the project team can use to assess and determine what level of engagement is desirable and feasible at different phases of a project. The Engagement Spectrum also discusses the power relationships and knowledge sharing that takes place at each level of engagement on the spectrum.

Engagement Spectrum Adapted for Landscape Architecture Practice

Adapted from the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum, Figure 6.5 defines six levels of community engagement. Moving from inform to empower, the levels of engagement represent increasing potential for the community to impact a project's outcomes. Additional descriptions differentiate the power relationships and knowledge sharing between the project team (landscape architects + consultants + clients) and a community that can happen at each level on the spectrum.

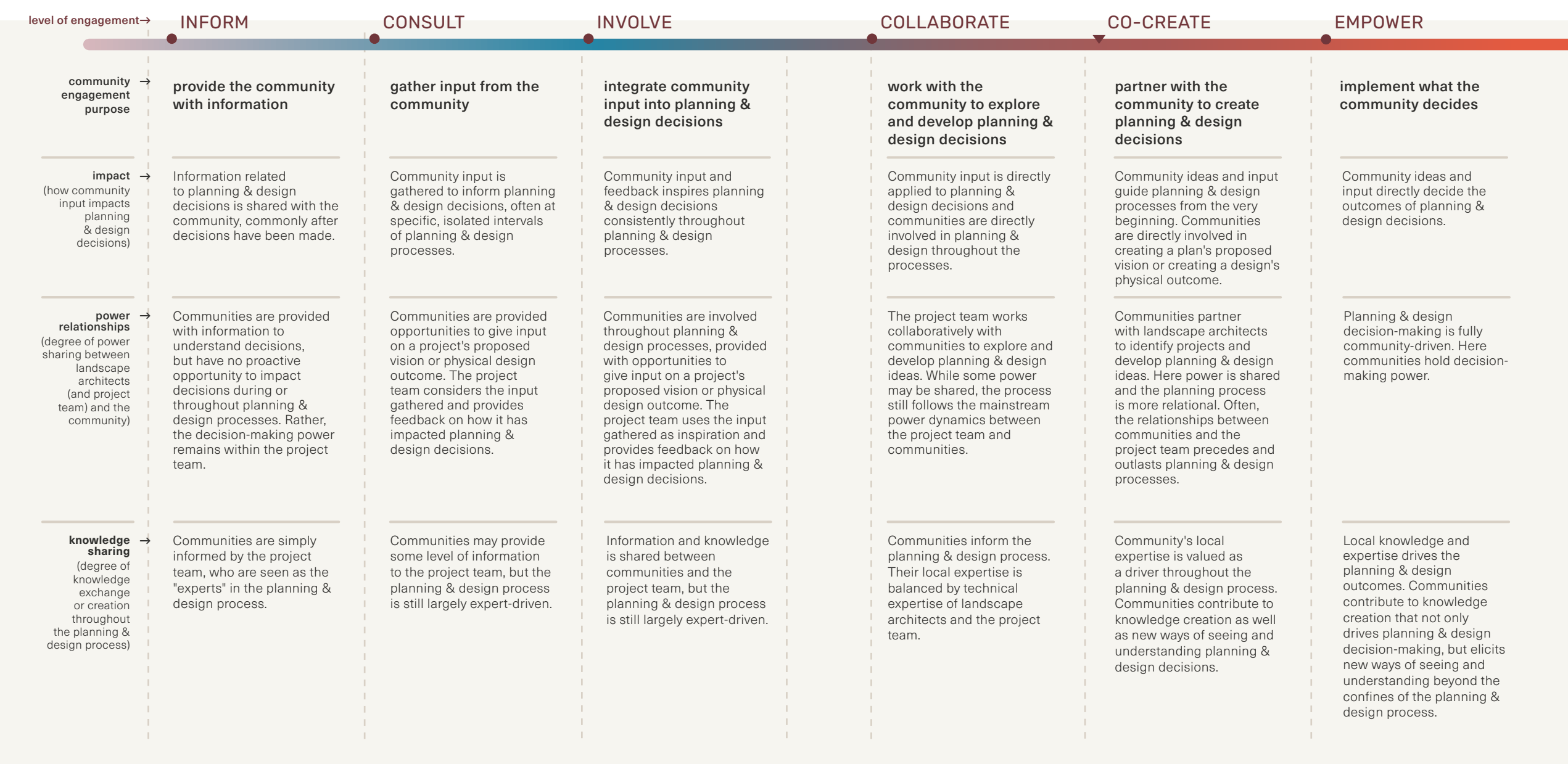


Figure 6.5 Engagement Spectrum Adapted for Landscape Architecture Practice (adapted from IAP2, n.d.)

Connecting the Engagement Spectrum to the Planning & Design Process

Figure 6.6 details how each level of engagement is connected to the phases of the planning & design process.



Figure 6.6 Connecting the Engagement Spectrum to the Planning & Design Process (adapted from IAP2, n.d.)

05

Mobilizing a Project

Understanding Your Client

Clients, whether in public or private sectors, can have significant impact on community engagement processes—from providing funding for the engagement process to the implementation of project outcomes. Understanding the priorities of your client is important; local parks departments will likely have different priorities than real estate developers. Clients in the public and private sectors will also likely have different levels of requirements for engagement. In some cases, clients may not fully understand the necessity and value of meaningful community engagement.

It is important to ensure that clients and the project team, are on the same page about community engagement. Clients must be willing to invest in and support the community engagement process for it to be meaningfully integrated throughout the design process. Landscape architects should convey the inherent value in engagement and the benefits it brings to projects.

The ROI Argument

Explaining the benefits of engagement through an economic lens may resonate with hesitant clients. Though engagement requires a significant upfront investment of time, energy, and resources, it pays dividends in economically resilient designs. "Having a diverse constituency interested in [a] project, is like a diverse economic portfolio," explains landscape architect David Rubin, "The more diverse, the more resilient to economic downturns" (2023). Moreover, the upfront investment in engagement can result in smoother, less expensive implementation processes, more visitorship and, thus, more revenue post-implementation (Campana 2023).

"ROI [*return on investment*] is an economic term, but it is easily understood in the context of a return on investment *for the community*; the return on investment *for the wallet*; the return of investment for *wellbeing*—and that's all valuable today."

— *David Rubin (2023)*

Similarly, diverse input and meaningful engagement can result in more socially and environmentally sustainable designs. Engagement builds a sense of ownership in a places which plays a role in long-term care and stewardship.

Project Proposals

When it comes to responding to request for proposals (RFPs) or request for qualifications (RFQs) there's a few things the project team should consider:

- Does this RFP/RFQ align with your engagement values?
- Is there an avenue for public input to influence the plan or design outcome?
- Does it allow space for community driven processes and meaningful, equitable engagement?
- Is there room for questions or negotiations with clients? Are there opportunities for flexibility and adaptability to respond to emerging engagement needs?

Clearly delineated engagement line items in an RFP/RFQ can be a good sign that clients understand and appreciate the value of engagement.

Scoping Engagement

When writing engagement scopes it can be difficult to find a balance between being too vague and being too specific. Ask yourself: What does the client need to know to understand the intention of engagement and what support and resources are needed to fulfill that intention? In general, engagement scopes should include an estimated number and type of engagement touchpoints; however, specific details on how each touchpoint will occur can likely be determined later. Building flexibility into the scope allows more room for adaptability as you move further into the project. Think of the project scope that is written into the proposal as an informed guess but not the end all be all.

A good place to start developing a project's scope is by looking at the project timeline. Begin to overlay the phases of the design process with the project timeline, identifying when the project should move from concept design to schematic design to design development. Then determine how you can weave in engagement throughout each phase of the design process.

Each phase in the design process may be associated with a big milestone. Identify the big milestones and determine what engagement touchpoint could be associated with them. When will you launch a survey? Host a public workshop? When will you conduct stakeholder interviews? Attend a pop-up event? From there you can begin to estimate the number and type of major engagements,

knowing that they will likely change and evolve as you get further into the project.

In between major milestones there may be several smaller engagements that will be developed and refined as you progress through the process.

EXAMPLE TIMELINE FOR A PROJECT'S ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

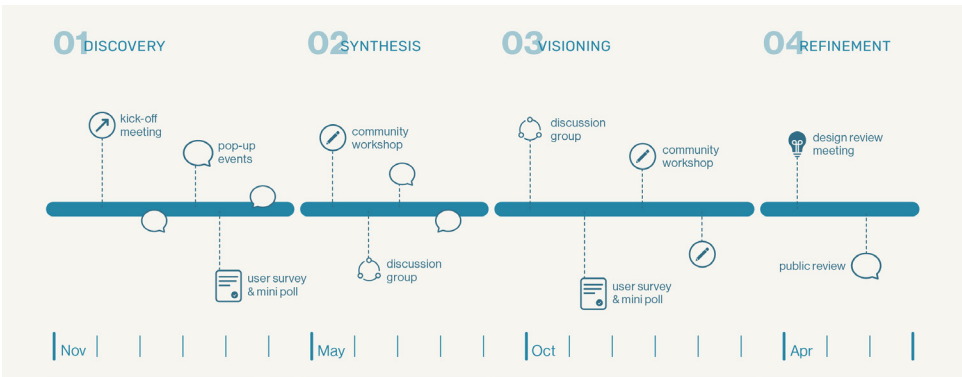


Figure 6.7 Example Timeline for a Project's Engagement Process (Siler 2023)

It is also helpful to graphically communicate the engagement scope and timeline to the community, such as the example in Figure 6.7, so they can get a sense of what to expect.

Building Your Team

During a project's proposal and contract stage, it is also important to consider whether your team may need to collaborate with a consultant.

When Might a Consultant Be Beneficial?

- Is the project situated in a location or community that you have no prior connection or relationships with?
- Is the project in a location that you have no experience working in?
- Is the project in a community that you are not a member of?
- Is there a need for language translation services?

When working in unfamiliar locations, it may be valuable to bring local consultants onto the project team to form more meaningful connections with the local community.

06

Encouraging Dialogue & Co-Creation

" There's other times where we actually get people to draw, you know, we'll have a base plan on the table, and we'll say, ***"Alright, just draw something, and let's see... how that feels"***...which is great...just putting pen to paper and watching what they're doing and seeing them get excited about that."

— Darell Campana (2023)

Designing Engagement Touchpoints

As you approach major milestones in the project, start to dive in and detail out the specifics of each engagement event.

When selecting and designing engagement events or activities consider the various scales of engagement tools and techniques. Not everyone can attend hours-long workshops or public meetings. Brainstorm creative ways to meet people where they are. Pop-up events can be an effective way to capture a broad number of perspectives in a short amount of time.

Designing engagement 'touchpoints' is a continuous process of learning from past engagements, adapting, and changing course. Seek out methods, techniques, and tools that are interactive and allow community members to directly participate in the planning and design process, whether it's through drawing on site plans or building models. After each engagement, take time to reflect on what worked and what didn't. Seek feedback from community members as well. This feedback can be applied to improve engagement processes in future projects, in addition to future phases of the current project.

Facilitating Engagement

There are several logistical considerations when facilitating engagement. Consider these questions before each engagement event or activity (informed by Hensold 2023):

- What are the conditions of the space?
- What is the flow of the space?
- What are everyone's roles and responsibilities?
- Where are people going to sit?
- Is someone from the project team greeting people?
- Is someone from the project team rotating around the engagement space?
- Is someone from the project team stationed at each of the engagement stations?
- Where are the outlets?
- Is a microphone needed?

Developing Engagement Skills

Though there are several technical considerations for facilitating engagement, the importance of soft skills cannot be stressed enough. Seek to build the following skills to create meaningful connections with communities and foster an equitable and meaningful engagement process.

Understanding Biases & Self Awareness

Understanding the biases you bring to engagement are important for breaking down barriers and creating an inclusive engagement environment.

Critical Thinking & Reflection

Critical thinking and reflection are essential for accurately and thoughtfully review and synthesize engagement findings. It is important to reflect back on what you heard from the community, as well as critically assess the effectiveness of community engagement and identify opportunities for improvement.

Active Listening

Active listening means listening to build understanding.

Verbal Communication

Verbal communication involves both public speaking and conversational skills. Practice being comfortable speaking in front of large groups, but also being able to connect with individuals in one-on-one conversations.

Graphic Communication

Graphic communication is important to not only creating fun and engaging outreach materials, but also communicating engagement findings and outcomes in a way that is clear and comprehensible.

Project Management

Project management involves communication, collaboration, problem-solving, and leadership to organize and guide the community engagement process.

Big Picture Thinking

It's important to be able to move back and forth between the little details and the bigger picture. Map out the major milestones as well as the intermediate steps to accomplish those milestones. Being prepared and anticipating what's coming next also folds into big picture thinking.

07

Translating & Representing Findings

"That one nugget of an idea
can spur *a whole different
approach* to a design"

— Brian Ulaszewski (2023)

Capturing Quantitative & Qualitative Data

Community engagement findings can be thought of as quantitative and qualitative data.

QUANTITATIVE DATA

- Quantitative data is numerical data; anything that can be counted or measured (Fullstory 2021)
- Often collected through surveys or voting exercises
- Helpful to show participation and consensus (How many people are participating? What are the demographics of the people participating? What are the priorities? What ideas or suggestions do people agree on? Where is there disagreements?)
- Analyzed through a process of statistical analysis

QUALITATIVE DATA

- Qualitative data is descriptive data; anything that can be observed or interpreted (Fullstory 2021)
- Often collected through open-ended questions and activities that provide opportunities for people to vocalize their thoughts, write comments, or sketch and draw their ideas
- Helpful to understand the why—the reasons behind community ideas and priorities (What local knowledge or personal narratives are shared by people? What are the nuances expressed by people? What are the common themes and interests?)
- Analyzed through a process of qualitative coding

Both quantitative and qualitative data are valuable for decision-making and informing outcomes. Where quantitative data tends to be more concrete, qualitative data tends to be more abstract and often more time intensive to analyze. However, this shouldn't be a reason to shy away from using methods to capture qualitative data; quotes, personal stories, and sketches are often where the rich, detailed, and nuanced ideas lie.

Representing Findings

Representing engagement findings, whether it be through quotes, summaries, or images and graphics, is an important way to show the community that their input was heard and understood. During the early phases of a project, representations of findings may be primarily in written form through digital posts and updates. The engagement team may also present 'what we heard reports,' goal statements, and summaries of direct quotes. In the later stages of the project, it becomes more important to give physical form to engagement findings—how does it translate to the three-dimensional landscape? Here, precedent images can be helpful tool to communicate findings and design ideas. During the later stages of design development, more developed plans and renderings can communicate in greater detail what a final design will look like. Digital or physical models can also be a helpful tool to show what the design would feel like. Keep in mind that not everyone knows how to “read” landscape architecture graphics. Making graphics approachable, clear, and engaging to a variety of audiences is important and will help make the process more inclusive.

Using Data to Inform Outcomes

It is always important to connect data from community engagement back to the project outcomes. When synthesizing engagement findings, ask yourself how can this inform, inspire, or shape the final outcome? Sometimes, engagement findings may be more abstract and interpretive. Other times, especially when partnering with communities to co-create plans and designs, engagement findings can translate literally to plans and designs.

Even if the feedback isn't directly applicable to the current project, it is still valuable to document and record it. Engagement findings can contribute to a larger bank of findings that can be pulled from for future projects in the same community.

Making Meaning From the Findings

The following steps will walk you through the process of making meaning from community engagement findings. Similar to the process of qualitative coding, careful thought and consideration are needed when sifting through data to identify common themes and ideas.

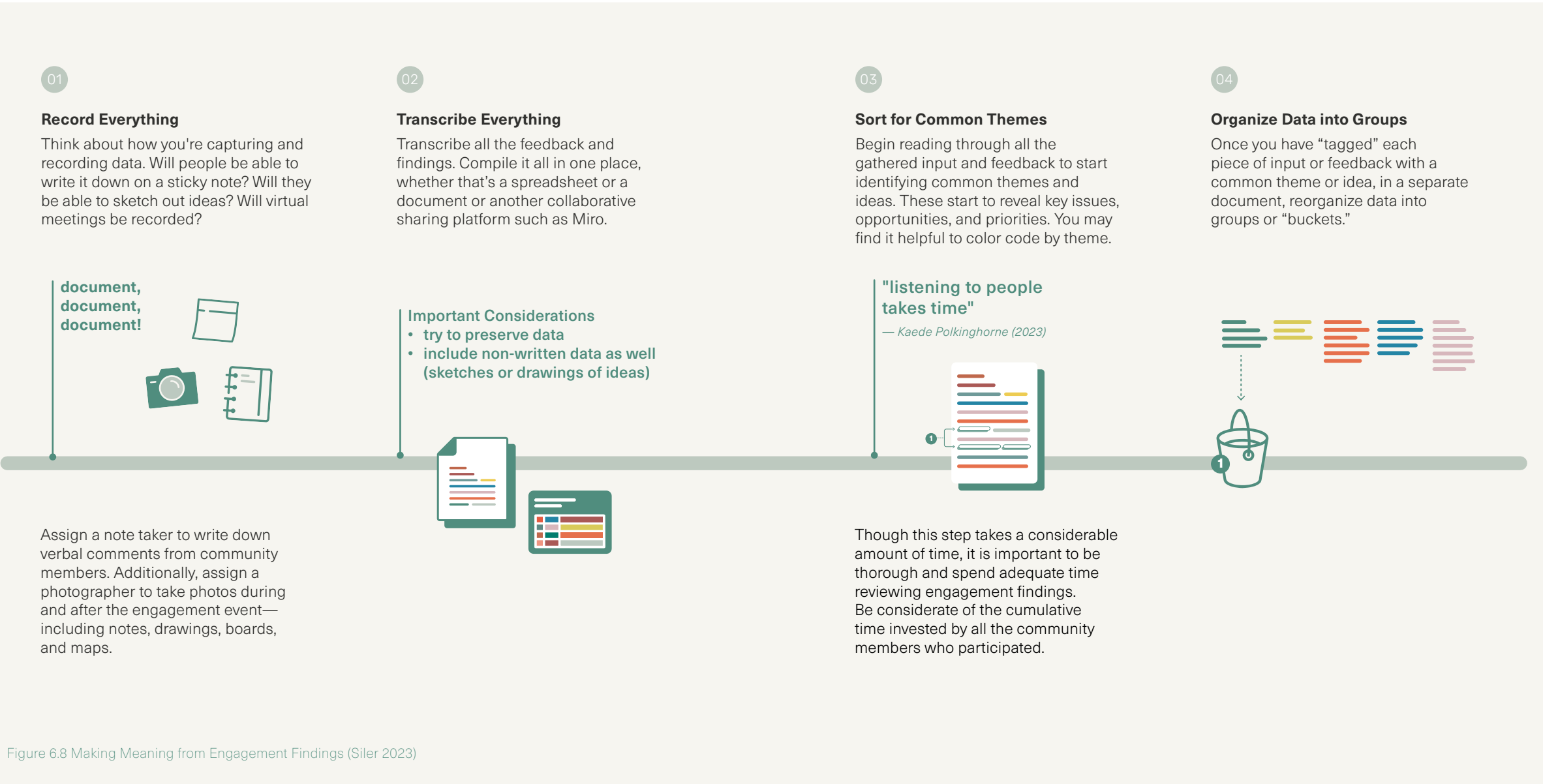


Figure 6.8 Making Meaning from Engagement Findings (Siler 2023)

05

Write Summary Statements

For each "bucket," create a short overview statement summarizing the main ideas and sentiments expressed in the findings. These statements could express common values, goals, interests, or priorities that can later shape the design.

"we try to keep the *original spirit and intent* of what we heard present at all steps of synthesis"

— Brie Hensold (2023)

06

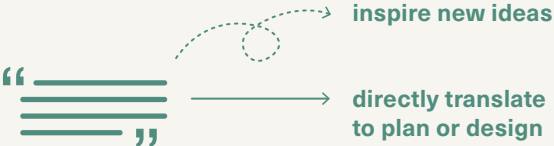
Report Back

An important step in closing the feedback loop is reporting back your findings and takeaways to the community. This creates a "checks and balances," allowing you to confirm if what you heard accurately reflects the community's priorities. A few ways to do this are creating 'What We Heard' reports, creating goal statements, and pulling out direct quotes to represent key ideas.

07

Connect it Back to Design

When sifting through engagement findings, keep in mind that some ideas have more direct applications to the final plan or design, where others can inspire or spark new ideas.

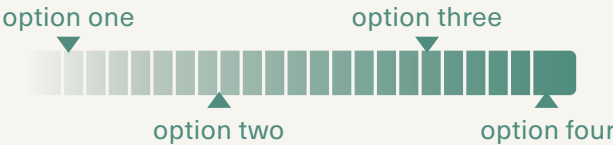


PRECEDENT IMAGES

To help visualize and give form to community ideas, you can begin attaching a precedent image to the major themes.

PROVIDE OPTIONS ON A SPECTRUM

Once you complete the visioning and programming stages of the design process and start moving to spatial layout and design, it is important to develop multiple design options. Try to represent the range of ideas expressed from the community. It may be helpful to think of the proposed iterations or alternatives along a spectrum of change. For example, open lawns to native plantings; active recreation areas to quiet, serene spaces.



"The other thing we do, is always come back with options...and we try to take a very different approach to every option and say, "In this one, how are we looking at the *hydrological system*? How are we looking at *ecology*? How are we looking at *recreation*? How are we looking at experiences from a *cultural standpoint*?"

— Anna Cawrse (2023)

Figure 6.9 Connecting Engagement Findings Back to Design (Siler 2023)

08

Building Resilience & Community Capacity

"It's really about the long-term nature; what is the community building for *itself* as opposed to what is the product?"

— Deb Guenther (2023)

Growing Participation Capacity

An important aspect of community engagement is developing a community's participation capacity—the skills needed for meaningful participation. These could include soft skills such as dialogue and active listening or technical skills such as understanding how to use digital engagement programs or knowing how to read site plans. This also involves educating communities about landscape architecture, bringing awareness to the complex social and environmental issues landscape architects work to address.

I think so many times as designers we shy away from sharing *technical challenges or issues or opportunities*, because we might assume the community doesn't care or can't understand that... There could be huge issues around *contamination*. There could be huge issues around *flooding*. Let's explain that to the community in the way that they can understand and sort of come along with you in the process as you make these changes"

—Anna Cawrse (2023)

Community engagement processes can also help develop:

- leadership skills
- collaboration skills
- building relationships and social networks
- understanding diverse perspectives
- problem-solving skills

Ownership & Stewardship

Another outcome and benefit to community engagement is the feeling of ownership that it builds among community members. When communities see their ideas reflected in the built environment, they are more likely to feel a sense of ownership and belonging. This also contributes to stewardship for a place. Having invested time, knowledge, and ideas into the planning and design process, communities may be more likely to feel a sense of responsibility for a space which translates into the long-term care and maintenance needed to sustain a place.

Landscape Architects as Connectors

Landscape architects are in a unique positions as intermediaries or connectors between local municipalities and communities. As landscape architect Will Coleman explains, landscape architects can "help the city and the community understand each other a little better" (2023). Additionally, landscape architects have potential to form partnerships and provide avenues for further community building all through the design process. When community engagement processes are integrated throughout the design process, they bring people together, often the same people multiple times. These repeated interactions start to form relationships. Additionally, when community members engage in conversations about design, they also begin to understand others' perspectives. Landscape architect David Rubin further expands on this idea that "it is the act of conversation that uplifts culture because we allow for the identities of the breadth of constituency—everyone, no matter the age, ethnicity, gender, demographic—to feel their own presence in a space, and to find the value in that towards identity" (2023).

Sustained Local Action

Lastly, community engagement opens up doors for sustained local action beyond the planning and design realm. Meaningful engagement reinforces agency and self-determination within communities. It can either tap into an issue that is important to the community or spark new ideas that lead to further civic engagement, such as encouraging people to participate in local politics or embark on new business ventures.

Conclusion

Relevance to Landscape Architecture
Relevance to the Field of Engagement
Limitations
Future Research

Relevance to Landscape Architecture

Community engagement is a process grounded in people—on the needs, aspirations, ideas, and collective visions formed by the people who know their community the best. This local knowledge and expertise is invaluable to designers; no amount of formal training or education can replace the intimate understanding of a place that comes from lived experience. More and more landscape architecture firms are recognizing this, shifting their firm approaches towards truly community-driven processes.

As community engagement becomes an increasingly valuable and necessary part of landscape architecture practice, it is essential that landscape architects understand how to develop and implement *meaningful* engagement processes—processes that seek to rebuild trust, give voice to marginalized communities, share power, and follow through with promises of cultural vitality, economic prosperity, social equity, and community resilience.

Moreover, it is even more pertinent that landscape architecture students and emerging professionals have an understanding of how to *do* meaningful engagement.

Through a mixed-methods approach that included document analysis and interviews, this project sought to better understand what landscape architecture students and emerging professionals should know about developing and implementing community engagement within landscape architecture practice. Document analysis provided a broad, base understanding of the community engagement process. However, because the existing guides were not written through the lens of landscape architecture, they did not connect engagement to the planning and design process nor planning and design outcomes. Therefore, there were gaps in existing published guides—missing information that could be relevant or pertinent to landscape architects.

The four phases of engagement—discover, plan, engage & respond—that were identified through initial research and document analysis, provided a framework that helped guide the interviews with landscape architecture practitioners. The interviews with landscape architecture practitioners aimed to fill in the gaps from existing guides by providing a “behind the scenes” look at community engagement in landscape architecture practice. The insight provided by people in the field doing engagement work, while they don’t replace personal experience, provides

a glimpse into how to effectively develop and implement meaningful community engagement processes. The resulting primer, *Engaging Communities: A Primer for Landscape Architecture Practice*, brings together findings from document analysis and interviews. It is intended to be a resource for students curious about these “behind the scenes” aspects. Moreover, learning from others’ experience can provide an introduction to potential challenges and important considerations that landscape architecture students and emerging professionals may face when they enter the field.

Ultimately landscape architects are in a unique position to do meaningful community engagement. When engagement and design processes are interwoven (rather than two separate, but parallel processes), landscape architects are able to more closely connect community input to planning and design outcomes—to give form and function to community ideas and translate those ideas into something that is actionable and implementable.

Landscape architects have a responsibility to advocate for meaningful community engagement processes that are rooted in fostering relationships built on trust and forming a deep understanding of people and place. Investing time in listening and authentic conversations early on in the process, provides a foundation from which to create better plans, stronger designers, and more resilient communities.

Relevance to the Field of Engagement

While the primer is written through the lens of landscape architecture practice, it includes contributions that could be valuable to the larger field of engagement, namely providing diagrams and illustrations to help others visualize aspects of the engagement process.

Additionally, the considerations included in the primer could be relevant or applicable to other disciplines who, similar to landscape architects, bring a certain level of technical expertise to the engagement processes. The primer’s discussion on equity, power relationships, and knowledge sharing could help other disciplines recognize the balance between expert-driven and community-driven processes.

Limitations

Engaging Communities: A Primer for Landscape Architecture Practice was created to provide landscape architecture students and emerging professionals guidance on planning and implementing meaningful community engagement processes. The primer is not meant to be prescriptive; rather it is intended to provide a place to start. Community engagement, by nature, is contextual and should be different from project to project and community to community.

Additionally, the selected interviews, while from a range of firm locations, sizes, and models, do not represent the full breath of organizations and people doing engagement within the landscape architecture realm. Interviews with community design centers, local community organizations, etc. would add more depth and diverse perspectives on community engagement processes, particularly on more relational, hyperlocal, and bottom-up approaches.

Future Research

The community engagement process shares many similarities with the research process; literature review could be compared to the discovery phase, methodology could be compared to the planning phase; conducting first-hand research could be compared to engagement, etc. This report engaged planning and landscape architecture practitioners through interviews. The findings from these interviews helped inform and inspire the creation of *Engaging Communities: A Primer for Landscape Architecture Practice*. The primer could be strengthened by going through a peer review to gather input and additional feedback from practitioners. Similar to engagement, this process should be iterative and ever evolving.

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Appendix



TO: Jessica Canfield
Landscape Archit & Comm Plan
Manhattan, KS 66506

Proposal Number: IRB-11425

FROM: Lisa Rubin, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 11/22/2022

RE: Proposal Entitled, “The "Behind the Scenes" of Community Engagement: Conversations about Community Engagement in Landscape Architecture Practice.”

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects / Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Kansas State University has reviewed the proposal identified above and has determined that it is EXEMPT from further IRB review. This exemption applies only to the proposal - as written – and currently on file with the IRB. Any change potentially affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation and may disqualify the proposal from exemption.

Based upon information provided to the IRB, this activity is exempt under the criteria set forth in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, **45 CFR §104(d), category:Exempt Category 2 Subsection ii.**

Certain research is exempt from the requirements of HHS/OHRP regulations. A determination that research is exempt does not imply that investigators have no ethical responsibilities to subjects in such research; it means only that the regulatory requirements related to IRB review, informed consent, and assurance of compliance do not apply to the research.

Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, the University Research Compliance Office, and if the subjects are KSU students, to the Director of the Student Health Center.

Electronically signed by Phill Vardiman on 11/27/2022 2:06 PM ET
On Behalf of IRB Chair