

ELEVATED CHICAGO

Community Engagement
Principles & Recommendations



Engaging Community

Many recognize the importance of engaging community in decisions about the built environment but struggle to do so effectively. This document lays out 8 principles—with recommendations and practices to support each—to create more meaningful opportunities for the residents most directly affected by development taking place in their neighborhood. A more comprehensive report with case studies and best practices can be found at ElevatedChicago.org/Engage.

This document is for practitioners working at the forefront of community engagement, from local government and planning agencies to developers and community-based organizations.

This document is for practitioners working at the forefront of community engagement from local government and planning agencies to developers and community-based organizations. While there is an emphasis on the built environment, the principles and insights herein are intended to be applicable in a variety of contexts from participatory budgeting to planning a community garden or mural project, to preparing for the development of a new housing development or transit station.

Elevated Chicago eHubs

Elevated Chicago is an innovative collaboration of community-based and region-wide organizations working in the public, private and nonprofit sectors who have come together to create a more racially equitable city and region. To accomplish this, we are using an approach called Equitable Transit Oriented Development, or eTOD. The City of Chicago's Transit Oriented Development ordinance and policy make areas surrounding transit stops especially attractive for development: eTOD helps ensure that these new assets and wealth will be enjoyed equitably by the area's existing and longtime residents. One of our key goals is to prevent further resident and business displacement by helping to develop more prosperous, healthy, and resilient communities. As part of this effort, we aim to transform the power dynamics that determine how neighborhoods are built in Chicago by engaging community residents more authentically, efficiently, and inclusively.

Elevated Chicago is working around seven Chicago Transit Authority stations. Elevated Chicago partners invest resources in programs and projects within the ½ mile radius around each station to advance racial equity in health, climate and cultural indicators. These transit-rich circles are called equitable hubs, or eHubs. They include:

- **Green Line South**
- **Pink Line - California**
- **Kedzie Corridor**
- **Blue Line - Logan Square**

Spectrum of Public Participation

Adapted from the International Association for Public Participation

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

New Framework, New Mindset

Building on the International Association for Public Participation spectrum, Elevated Chicago puts forth the following framework for working towards an optimized community engagement process that results in greater community ownership.

Community engagement does not end when a structure is built or project implemented—residents should have an ongoing role to play in its long-term stewardship and ownership, and should benefit from the wealth and opportunities created.

“There are a lot of talented people in our community, and the key to tapping into that talent is providing real opportunities to succeed. It has to be a two-way relationship”

—Luis Gutierrez, Latinos Progresando

There is a real opportunity to think anew about community engagement. City staff on the forefront of engaging residents are eager to improve their relationships, tools, and methods. Efforts such as Elevated Chicago and Resilient Chicago are catalyzing new conversations that can help advance engagement beyond the status quo, break out of tired patterns, and rebuild trust in decision making processes.

Let's do more, better.

The Corridor Development Initiative—led by the Chicago Department of Planning and Development, the Metropolitan Planning Council and the Garfield Park Community Council—engaged residents, business owners, and other stakeholders in the Kedzie Corridor to decide collaboratively the design and future plans for an Eco Orchard.



Principles & Recommendations

1

Shift our Mindset

Let's change our thinking! There are a few key mindsets that should be adopted when engaging communities.

1. See Value in All Voices

Despite any political and power dynamics that might be at play, we must bring a mindset that sees value in all voices. Toward that end, we should make our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion clear and demonstrable from the beginning of the community engagement process.

2. Redefine "Community"

We need to break down the notion that communities are monolithic, and see it as far more nuanced. "Community" is a network of individuals, each with unique perspectives and insights, connected by a shared lived experience of their neighborhood (or other context).

3. (Re)Build Trust

We need to acknowledge that residents' trust in both decision makers and their community engagement processes has been eroded. Our best way forward is to take every opportunity to acknowledge past mistakes and build and rebuild trust through both words and actions.

4. Foster Collective Learning

We must acknowledge past mistakes, adopt a learning mindset, and approach the process of community engagement with the goals of (1) improving it over time and (2) sharing lessons learned as we go along.

5. Be Mindful About Timelines

Community engagement, especially if you are committed to involving hard-to-reach populations, is time and resource intensive work. It should acknowledge and build on prior efforts, and pave the way for future ones.

6. Commit to an Action-Oriented Process

Even if the planning and design process may be long, find ways to generate tangible outcomes in the short term to demonstrate progress and action towards the larger objective.

"The role of Logan Square Neighborhood Association is to ensure the people most impacted have a place at decision-making tables, especially when it relates to community development. The voices of those most vulnerable should not only be included, but validated and heard—only this way can we achieve equity."

—Christian Diaz, Logan Square Neighborhood Association

2

Co-Design Community Engagement With Community

Community engagement is most meaningful and effective when the process is designed with community partners.

By shaping what it looks like together, we can get closer to a context- and community-specific process inclusive of diverse perspectives. Co-design also allows the opportunity to speak openly about and agree on guiding principles and ground rules to shape the process. It also enables us to be proactive rather than reactive when it comes to engaging communities.

This is admittedly a big lift, but it can be done in a more meaningful and manageable way by forming an initial representative steering committee or leadership group of community members to help shape the engagement plan. When co-designing the broader community engagement process with community partners, consider the following factors.

- 1. Name Power Dynamics**

Discuss where final decision making authority sits and identify the ways in which power is often exercised. Where possible, we must challenge power dynamics that hinder inclusive processes.

- 2. Communicate Appropriately**

Use terms that are inclusive and appropriate for the people we are trying to reach. Translation is also an obvious must when working with residents whose primary language is not English.

- 3. Offer Different Formats**

Select from a menu of participation platforms or formats that can accommodate different learning and exchange styles. For example, in person and virtual options, as well as analog and digital tools.

3

Enable Two-Way Communication & Learning

A fundamental goal of community engagement efforts should be to establish trusted, transparent two-way channels of communication and learning.

Having an ongoing dialogue with communities makes engagement around a particular project or plan easier because we already have a trusted relationship established. At the very least, an exchange of information, opportunities, and interests should go both ways.

- 1. Show Up**

The first step in rebuilding trust is to show up to events and meetings, even when you don't have an agenda.

- 2. Then Listen**

We must strive to more actively and "deeply" listen. Take the time to cast aside assumptions and more deeply understand each other's contexts, strengths, constraints, perspectives, motivations, and aspirations.

- 3. Be Explicit About Intentions**

It is disingenuous to invite input without the intention of using it, and a clear plan on how to do so.

- 4. Be Clear About Expectations**

In building stronger communication channels with community members, we must better manage expectations and be ready to welcome others in holding us accountable.

A photograph of a man standing and presenting to a group of people seated in a meeting room. The room has a high ceiling with exposed wooden beams and a single pendant light. The image is overlaid with a green tint.

Try:

Proposing ground rules for the discussion at the top of your meeting and allow folks to add or modify them to better reflect the context. Elevated Chicago's Rules of Engagement for meetings include the following:

We are aware of our power and our privilege

We embrace different communication styles, especially the ones farther apart from ours

We are mindful of speaking time to avoid a few people dominating the meeting

We listen with an open mind

We give and receive feedback, criticism and questioning

We seek multiple points of view

We check for diversity gaps (who is missing) and propose solutions for it

We actively pursue engagement of less vocal members

We assume good faith

4

Promote Cultural Competency and Empathy

We must get to know the contexts—community values and norms—in which we are working, really well.

1. Meet People Where They Are...

We hear this a lot. The most basic interpretation is to literally meet community members where they may already be convened, versus having them make an extra effort to come to a separate event. To take this concept one step further, it is important to meet communities where they are from a historic, cultural, and even emotional perspective.

2. ...And Be Aware of Where YOU Are.

Be aware of what energy and emotion you, and the organization you represent, are bringing to the space, as well.

3. R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Being respectful is fundamental to meaningful engagement. Respect is not just about treating people the way you would want to be treated. It is about treating them the way they want to be treated, and knowing the difference.

5

Value Community Knowledge & Capital

Community residents are, hands down, the experts on their community context and built environment challenges. We must not only acknowledge local expertise, but compensate and amplify it.

1. Seek Local Knowledge

Recognize that there is a long history of neighborhood planning across Chicago. Our effort must acknowledge prior plans vetted by the community and demonstrate how we intend to honor and integrate them moving forward.

2. Compensate

Compensation is important when we rely on others' time, expertise, or connections. Explore mechanisms and resources (in-kind or financial) to compensate for community participation to ensure your partners are and feel valued.

3. Redefine & Amplify Capital

Capital comes in many forms. We often undervalue, overlook, or take for granted the many forms of community capital—from cultural to knowledge—that can contribute to a planning process. It is important to reflect on the various forms of capital that can be leveraged and amplified.

4. Recruit & Procure Locally

Prioritize the recruitment of community residents for any jobs or activities created through capital and program investments, including roles like facilitators, architects, planners, designers, builders, property managers, service providers, owners, and stewards.



Walkability Assessment

In partnership with the Coalition to Lower Obesity in Chicago's Children, Latinos Progresando, and Esperanza Health Centers, residents and other local partners conducted a walkability assessment and provided a report to the Alderman's office and City departments requesting infrastructure upgrades and budget priorities to make the Pink Line - California eHub more walkable.

6

Seek & Embrace Multiple Viewpoints

Seek out and engage people who are or will be most affected by development decisions.

1. Define Diversity & Welcome It

We need to create spaces that are welcoming to as many community perspectives and voices as possible. For example, ensuring accessibility for residents living with disabilities to fully participate is essential when planning for the built environment.

2. Reach Out to the "Unusual" Suspects

Design engagement and learning opportunities to reach out beyond the residents and stakeholders who usually participate in community meetings and events, or those who already have channels to make their voice heard.

3. Avoid "Group Think"

Even if we have done our best to create a welcoming, inclusive environment, there still is the possibility for certain voices or viewpoints to dominate the discussion. Thus, we may consider employing multiple information and insight gathering methods to capture unique viewpoints.

4. Embrace Creative Tension

When practicing inclusive facilitation to ensure all voices are heard, we may often see conflict emerge. As facilitators of the discussion, we must strive to be more comfortable (and even trained in) moving conflict to a place of convergence and productively work through the "heat."

7

Cultivate Leadership & Advocacy

From inception and design to implementation and activation, we can use the built environment decision making process to cultivate and empower community leaders to lead future efforts.

1. Build Up Agency

From the start, strengthen community members' comfort and knowledge to more deeply engage throughout the process.

2. Do No Harm

Any intervention has intended and unintended consequences. The "do no harm" approach, adopted from the medical practice, acknowledges that sometimes doing something is more harmful than doing nothing at all.

3. Improve Collaborative Capacity

Provide strategic opportunities for building community leaders' capacity to collaborate within and across communities and decision makers. Avoid fostering divisiveness, "us vs. them" dynamics, and zero-sum games.

8

Foster Ownership & Identity in Community

What if community engagement around the built environment fostered ownership and built community wealth?

1. Celebrate Community Identity

Narratives, especially when reinforced through repetition, shape our perceptions of communities; and perceptions—whether consciously or subconsciously—influence outcomes for Chicago's communities. When we amplify and reinforce positive community narratives, we can overcome perceived and real barriers to change.

2. Demonstrate the Value of Permanent Community Assets, such as Transit

Building on a strong sense of place, explore ways to integrate technical and creative methods that spark interest in permanent community assets that may be underutilized or overlooked, such as transit stations or stops.

3. Build Ownership

In addition to cultivating a broad concept of "ownership," we should also be building community assets owned and managed by local residents. If we want to see a shift towards a more equitable city and region, we must find opportunities to build up community ownership and wealth in all projects and programs related to the built environment.



Try:

Finding fun, positive ways to celebrate community champions. An award ceremony, perhaps? Take a page out of RainReady's playbook and host a launch party for plans that are released to honor the community leaders and partners who made the process a success.

Thank You

Elevated Chicago's community engagement principles reflect insights and best practices from local and national practitioners. We are sincerely grateful for the time and expertise shared by the following individuals. We appreciate you and your work!

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Activation event at former Chicago Public School and future Overton Business and Technology Incubator, located in Elevated Chicago's 51st eHub, sponsored by Washington Park Development Group and organized with support from Borderless Studio. (Courtesy of Borderless Studio / Photo: Brandon Fields)



CONNECTING PEOPLE,
BUILDING EQUITY

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Elevated Chicago's Steering Committee*

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Garfield Park Community Council
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KLEO Community Family Life Center
Latinos Progresando
LUCHA
Logan Square Neighborhood Association
Metropolitan Planning Council
Sunshine Enterprises
The Chicago Community Trust
ThoughtWorks
UChicago Arts, Arts + Public Life
Washington Park Development Group

A list of individuals serving on our Steering Committee and Working Groups is available at ElevatedChicago.org.

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