

Community Engagement Principles 2.0



Duo/.

Your guide for:

- developing communities with (not for) people
- people-centric community development
- authentic, intentional inclusion





Community Engagement Principles 2.0

The updated version of Elevated Chicago's Community Engagement Principles & Recommendations is presented as a living document that should evolve and grow as we learn from new practices for more meaningful engagement. This concise version was built to set the groundwork for your practice and to be a strong reference to build from. Whether you are advocating at a city level or in your block, these principles will help set a strong foundation for best practices when engaging residents, stakeholders, and organizations – they are meant to complement your style and methods, to steward local voices confidently, in any context.

This document was produced in partnership with a variety of partners and stakeholders:

To bring the principles to action, we encourage you to stay up to date on the In-field kit and to refer to the research that was conducted to update these principles. Visit www.elevatedchicago.org/cep for more information.

Elevated Chicago Rules of Engagement During Meetings



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



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



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



We are aware of our power and our privilege.



We give and receive feedback, criticism and questioning.



We actively pursue engagement of less vocal members.



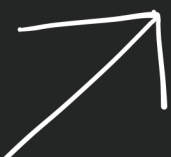
We assume good faith.



We listen with an open mind.



We seek multiple points of view.





Shift our mindset

Photo: Guns were smelted into shovels for planting trees as part of the reforestation effort Oaks of North Lawndale, led by the School of the Art Institute in Homan Square.



Shift our mindset

There are key mindsets that should be adopted when engaging residents, so that we can incorporate the diversity across communities, delight participants, and build trust to move us toward tangible outcomes.

>> Define “community”

We need to **break down the notion that “the community” is a uniform entity**. A “community” is a network of individuals, each with unique perspectives, insights, and affiliations, connected by a shared lived experience of their neighborhood (or another context). This means there are multiple and diverse communities within “the community” and our engagement should acknowledge this cultural richness and be intentional about which members of various communities should be included.

>> Aim to delight

We should **break the norm that “community engagement” = “meeting”**. Think about ways that you can delight residents through your engagement, making the process fun and memorable, as opposed to making participants feel like this is an obligation on top of their already busy schedules.

>> (Re)build and center trust

We should **acknowledge that residents’ trust in both decision makers and traditional community engagement processes has been eroded** due to processes that ranged from nonparticipation to various degrees of tokenism. When engaging communities that have been disappointed by past engagement efforts, we must start by healing and rebuilding trust and establishing “rules of engagement.” Moving forward, we should aim to build local power and take every opportunity to acknowledge past mistakes through words and actions and **be honest about the possible outcomes of the engagement**.

Move at the speed of trust: **Be generous with participants and give them adequate time to receive, integrate, reflect, and respond to information. If there are impending deadlines, be clear about them** (i.e., why they are there, why they are important, whether they can be adjusted, financial and non-financial costs of delays).





Co-design engagement with impacted communities

Photo: Designing a rain garden and shade sculpture near transit with community residents convened by the Garfield Park Community Council



Co-design engagement with impacted communities

Engagement is most meaningful and effective when the process is co-designed with the people who will be impacted by the proposed intervention.

>> Recognize the context(s)

Our engagement will **define how our collective decisions will influence a local context**. So, we should understand how that context came to be—historic and current events, policies, and decisions, as well as relationships across residents and leaders.

These **circumstances shape a lived experience** as a collection of interactions across shared settings, shaped by historical events and decisions. Recognizing the **importance of contexts** unlocks the beauty of a place, its residents, and manifests their potential.

>> Navigate power dynamics

Identify the ways that power is exercised, and ways it can be shared. Be clear about where final **decision-making authority** sits and **challenge power dynamics that promote exclusion** and oppression.

>> Communicate appropriately

Use terms that are inclusive and appropriate for the people you are trying to reach; **avoid jargon**. Adapt to the communication styles present (e.g., direct/indirect, emotionally restrained/expressive).

>> Offer different formats

Select from a menu of participation platforms or formats that can **accommodate different learning and exchange styles** (e.g., in person/virtual, digital/analog). And remember, not everyone feels comfortable participating even though they have access to the decision-making table.

>> Be action-oriented

Even if the planning and design process may be long, find ways to **generate tangible outcomes**—be that pop-up markets or temporary displays—to demonstrate progress and momentum towards the larger outcome.





Enable two-way communication and learning

Photo: Youth explored urban planning and designed development concepts for vacant lots with artist Tonika Johnson and developer Ghian Foreman at the Undesign the Redline Youth Summit co-sponsored by Elevated Chicago



Enable two-way communication and learning

Engagement efforts should aim to establish trusted, transparent two-way channels of communication and learning.

>> Show up...

Show up to events and meetings, **even when you don't have an agenda. Attend as many events as you can**, find ways to deeply understand and support communities' priorities.

...then, observe and listen

We must strive to more **actively and deeply observe and listen**. Take the time to cast aside assumptions and more deeply understand each other's contexts, strengths, constraints, perspective, motivations, and aspirations. Observing and listening should be more about informing the vision rather than just requesting input on a plan.

>> Be explicit about intentions and expectations

It is important **to intentionally demonstrate how input is considered and how it will influence decision-making**. And to create accountability, there should be clear expectations set for engagement leads and participants (e.g., purpose, time commitments, goals and constraints).

>> Foster collective learning

Every **context is different and changes over time**. Approach the engagement process with a learning mindset with the goal of continually doing it better. Seek and try new things and incorporate lessons from past successes.

We don't need all the answers, just the willingness to improve over time—**gather feedback, reflect, and iterate along the way**. To foster collective learning, be willing to **share your lessons learned with others**, especially those you interacted with directly.





Promote empathy and cultural competency

Photo: Opening ceremony by Ollin Kuikath at the March for Racial Equity in Logan Square, organized by Palenque LSNA



Promote empathy and cultural competency

We must ground all our actions around respect and get to know the contexts in which we are working, really well.

>> Meet people where they are...

Literally meet residents where they may already be convened. **Plan engagement activities that can be part of existing events organized by others.** Always be scouting for opportunities to collaborate and overlap with local partners.

Take this concept one step further, and meet communities where they are from a historic, cultural, and emotional context.

>> ...and be aware of where you are

Be aware of what energy, constraints and emotion you and the organization you represent are bringing to the space. **Be explicit with your engagement partners about any circumstances affecting you or your** organization if they are likely to impact the engagement process—Is this a busier-than-normal season? Are you or your organization going through a transition? Embrace vulnerability as a way to empathize and build trust.

>> R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Being respectful is fundamental to meaningful engagement. Respect is about knowing the difference between treating people the way you would want to be treated, AND about treating them the way they want to be treated. **Use contextual, trauma-informed and culturally appropriate forms of engagement.**





Value local knowledge and capital

Photo: Community organizations, small businesses and developers receive equitable transit-oriented development (ETOD) grants to support localized community and economic development efforts.



Value local knowledge and capital

Residents are, hands down, the experts on their context and built environment. We must acknowledge local expertise, compensate, and amplify it.

>> Seek local knowledge

We should recognize the long history of neighborhood planning across Chicago. Our effort must **acknowledge prior plans vetted by residents** and demonstrate how we intend to honor and integrate them moving forward.

>> Compensate

Compensation is important any time we rely on others for time, expertise, or connections. Explore ways (in-kind or financial) to **compensate for participation** to ensure your partners are and feel valued.

>> Focus on assets and abundance

Value, amplify, and incorporate the many forms of local capital that can contribute to the process (e.g., financial, political, social, cultural, knowledge).

Acknowledge the deficits and needs that your engagement is trying to address but **start by centering all the assets within the local context**. Bring an abundance and asset-based approach to your work, knowing that there are many resources locally-available and leaning into **local expertise can be a key to unlocking solutions**.

>> Recruit and procure locally

Prioritize the recruitment of **residents for any jobs or activities created through engagement activities, capital and program investments** (e.g., facilitators, architects, planners, designers, builders, property managers, investors, venues, food vendors).





Seek and embrace multiple viewpoints

Photo: Community-driven ETOD action planning for the Garfield station area co-led by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning and the Green Line South Community Table.



Seek and embrace multiple viewpoints

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

>> Welcome diversity and embrace creative tension

Create spaces that are welcoming to as many perspectives and voices as possible—even when they **have opposing views**. Unproductive conflict can be mitigated by collectively establishing ground rules to set inclusive norms and demonstrating them in our own actions.

Creative tension can be productive and constructive to arrive at more holistic decisions but requires a greater tolerance for conflict. Thinking less about “resolving” the conflict and more about “transforming” it into a productive space to dig into what underpins opinions. This requires **discerning between listening and stepping in**.

>> Elevate traditionally excluded voices

We should make our **commitment to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion** clear and demonstrable from the beginning of the engagement process, and while all voices have value, **not all voices have equal value in every context**. Given traditional political and power dynamics, we must **value excluded voices—those that have been continuously oppressed and silenced**. We must be careful not to place value on a majority opinion when said majority aims to exclude and/or oppress others.

>> Value quality over quantity: Include the “unusual suspects”

Aim for more than the number of residents who show up. Reach out beyond the residents/stakeholders who usually participate, or those who already have channels to make their voice heard. This will enrich your engagement and provide more quality feedback from a broader range of perspectives. **Reflect on who you were unable to engage** and ask yourself why, and how to include them in the future.

>> Avoid “groupthink”

Consider **employing varied information and insight gathering methods** to capture unique viewpoints and balance out dominant voices or narratives.

>> Create accessible and welcoming experiences

Ensuring accessibility for residents living with disabilities is essential when planning for the built environment. Additionally, events should offer culturally appropriate food, child-care, and translation services; for example, respect confidentiality, and be held at times that are not burdensome to participants.





Cultivate leadership and advocacy

Photo: Community members vote on the Lucy Parson Gonzalez Apartments, a 100-unit affordable housing development by Bickerdike Redevelopment Corporation in Logan Square.



Photo credit: John Greenfield (Streetsblog)

Cultivate leadership and advocacy

From inception and design to implementation and activation, we can use the engagement process to support, cultivate and empower local leaders on their current and future efforts.

>> Build up agency

Support established and emerging leaders through the engagement process. From the start, strengthen participants' comfort and knowledge to engage throughout the process more deeply—review project phases, define jargon, share project financials, and check in regularly to see what/if additional support may be needed.

>> Do no harm

Sometimes, doing something is more harmful than doing nothing at all. By bringing a “do no harm” approach, we are **committing to examine the dynamics that can lead to negative impacts** and unintended consequences. Our engagement should be the product of an invitation, and when we show up, we should do so to serve rather than direct or extract.

>> Foster collaborative capacity

Our engagement should **enable participants to collaborate and learn from one another** and enhance their collective capacity by creating new and/or strengthening existing collaboration networks/associations. Ask participants what type of expertise they see as missing in their networks and make connections that can fill in those gaps.





Foster ownership and identity

Photo: Local vendors, artists, musicians, and residents enjoy the Vends and Vibes Market created by UChicago Arts and Public Life at the former Garfield CTA station in Washington Park.



Photo credit: Sarah Pooley

Foster ownership and identity

The engagement process should foster ownership and build local wealth.

>> Celebrate identities

Amplify the richness across communities' identities to spread and **reinforce positive narratives** to overcome perceived barriers to change. Find opportunities to reinforce a sense of place, such as: investing in demonstration projects that highlight local art and culture, co-creating events with partners that have a distinct neighborhood identity, engaging civic journalism to highlight local stories. Remember, our narratives shape our outcomes.

>> Value and activate local permanent assets

Explore ways to **spark interest and pride in permanent assets** that may be underutilized or overlooked (e.g., transit stops, rail underpasses)—make these areas beautiful, interesting, exciting, and meaningful.

>> Build ownership

Beyond cultivating a broad sense of “ownership,” we should also be **building assets owned and managed by local residents that provide a direct financial benefit to locals**. These activities can range from homeownership programs, to low cost capital to businesses, to investment opportunities for residents in new developments.



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Chicago, IL



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Thank you

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