

**BLOOMBERG
HARVARD**

City
Leadership
Initiative

WORKBOOK

City Leader Guide on Civic Engagement

Designing Pathways
for Participatory Problem-Solving

Authors

Hollie Russon Gilman
Jorrit de Jong
Archon Fung
Rebecca Rosen
Gaylen Moore

Series Editor

Jorrit de Jong

Advisors and Contributors

LaChaun Banks
Jessica Creighton
David Giles
Bulbul Kaul
Kimberlyn Leary
Quinton Mayne
Mark Moore
Jessica Tang

*A fillable companion for your city's civic
engagement team to use alongside the Guide.*

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Suggested Users

City officials should undertake the exercises in this workbook in consultation with relevant internal and external partners and community groups.

Exercise	Mayor/City Manager	Core Staff	Additional City Departments & Staff	Community Organizations & Partners
Self-Assessment				
Historical Context	•	•	•	•
Development Rubric: Current State Assessment	•	•	•	•
Interpreting Your Assessment	•	•		
Design Your Civic Engagement				
Review Your Design	•	•	•	•
Summary: Key Design Points		•	•	
Implementation: Internal Considerations	•	•		
Evaluation				
Revisit the Rubric	•	•	•	•

Self-Assessment

This section is a self-assessment to help you and your team understand the unique circumstances of your city, consider pitfalls, and identify opportunities for improved engagement experiences.

There are two parts to this self-assessment: a reflection on your history with civic engagement and a rubric for understanding the state of current efforts.

We encourage you to work with stakeholders who act formally and informally as authorizers, implementers, and evaluators of your city's civic engagement processes to complete this assessment and incorporate their perspectives and insights into your findings. This assessment is not intended as a one-off, but as a resource you can return to periodically as you continue to learn and improve engagement practices.

Historical Context

Use these questions for surveys, interviews, conversations with residents and community stakeholders, and meetings and exercises with your team.



In the past, have residents had power to participate in public problem-solving?

Yes No

1. If not, why not?
2. If so, how frequently has the city engaged residents?
3. How satisfied have city officials been with civic engagement efforts?
Very Dissatisfied
Somewhat Dissatisfied
Somewhat Satisfied
Very Satisfied
4. How satisfied have residents been with city hall's engagement efforts?
Very Dissatisfied
Somewhat Dissatisfied
Somewhat Satisfied
Very Satisfied
5. What do the most satisfying engagement efforts have in common?
6. What do the least satisfying engagement efforts have in common?
7. What differences have you observed in how different residents tend to engage?

8. Who has shown up and who has not?

9. Who has had voice and who has not?



Why has the city engaged residents and community stakeholders in the past?

1. What motivated the engagement effort?

2. How did the city define successful engagement?

3. How did residents and stakeholders define successful engagement?

4. What did the city want to accomplish that it could not accomplish without civic engagement?

5. What kind of assistance did the city seek from residents (e.g., time, input, resources, expertise, etc.)?

**What have been subjects of civic engagement in the past?**

1. What subjects, policies, or political decisions has civic engagement focused on in the past?
2. Who has typically nominated and defined the subject for civic engagement?
3. How broad or narrow have the topics of engagement been?
4. In what areas of politics, policy, or decision-making have residents *not* had input?
5. Were the subjects of civic engagement efforts relatable to participants and aligned with their expertise? Yes No
Elaborate:
6. Did residents have access to accurate data, information, and context to participate in an informed way? Yes No
Elaborate:

**Who has been engaged in the past? Who has not?**

1. In city-led engagement efforts, has the city reached out to residents in general, to specific groups of people, or to organizations representing specific groups?
2. How does the demographic makeup of those engaging with city government compare to the demographic makeup of the city in terms of race, gender, age, income, education, geographic location, immigration status, and other variables?
3. Which community leaders, business associations, voluntary sector organizations, or activists have traditionally been most frequently engaged, and how representative are they of the city as a whole?
4. What constraints, limitations, or barriers has the city encountered in efforts to engage particular audiences or groups?
5. During these engagement opportunities, who represented city government?
6. Were the decision-makers present? Yes No
Elaborate:
7. Did residents have power to design any part of the engagement? Yes No
Elaborate:



How has the city engaged residents in the past?

1. What tools has your city used to engage residents in the past?
2. How have residents responded to those tools?
3. Were the engagements managed and moderated by city officials or outside facilitators?
4. What worked or did not work about the moderation?
5. Did residents or community groups have a role in managing or facilitating events? Yes No
Elaborate:
6. In what ways did the city respond to residents' feedback, concerns, and ideas during and after these various efforts?
7. How were actions and outcomes communicated back to the public?
8. What types of channels did the city use to communicate, invite, and alert residents and/or partners to engagement opportunities (e.g., social media channels, in person, websites, press releases, etc.)?

9. How did the city make this information accessible to various audiences (e.g., translations, digital, paper, etc.)?

10. Were events accessible to all residents? Yes No

Elaborate:

11. What measures were taken to ensure accessibility?



Have residents engaged the city in the past?

1. What mechanisms and structures have been available for residents to initiate engagement with the city (e.g., citizen initiatives, petitions, demonstrations, complaints procedures, etc.)?

2. Have residents engaged with city hall or expressed preferences, concerns, support, or dissatisfaction through non-established mechanisms in the past? Yes No

3. If so, which residents and community stakeholders engaged the city and on what topics?

4. Were their motivations and demands clear to city government? Yes No

Elaborate:

5. What were the results of the engagement?

6. How satisfied were residents after the engagement?

Very Dissatisfied

Somewhat Dissatisfied

Somewhat Satisfied

Very Satisfied

7. How satisfied were city officials after the engagement?

Very Dissatisfied

Somewhat Dissatisfied





Somewhat Satisfied

Very Satisfied


8. What has the city learned from moments when residents engaged the city?


Development Rubric: Current State Assessment


Place a check mark indicating your city's stage of development for each question based on the descriptions in the Guide.


QUESTIONS	Nascent	Intermediate	Mature
 WHY?			
How does city hall define and measure success for civic engagement efforts?			
How do the engagement goals align with city hall's priorities?			
To what extent do residents' concerns and ideas inform engagement efforts?			
How clear are the city's goals to residents?			
 WHAT?			
How much information about the subjects of engagement is available to residents?			
Who is involved in nominating, defining, and refining the subjects for engagement?			
Does the information provided make it easier for residents to contribute meaningfully?			
 WHO?			
Who is being engaged?			
How diverse and representative is the group of residents participating in engagement efforts?			
Do voluntary civic organizations participate in engagement efforts and work with the city to improve them?			
Who represents the city in civic engagement opportunities?			
 HOW?			
How large is the city's toolbox? How varied are the ways in which the city engages residents?			
How does city hall deal with engagement efforts that are initiated by residents or grassroots organizations?			
How does the city incorporate accessibility tools and accommodations to make civic engagement inclusive?			
Are invitations clear and specific as to what is being requested of residents?			
Does city hall support and align engagement efforts across departments?			
Does city hall incorporate engagement throughout decision-making processes?			
How many channels does city hall use to communicate civic engagement opportunities to residents?			
How does city hall handle feedback and communicate outcomes back to residents?			

Once you have completed the rubric, consider the whole. Based on the entirety of the self-assessment, where does your city stand overall on each of the design framework questions?

	Nascent	Intermediate	Mature
 WHY?			
	Notes:		

	Nascent	Intermediate	Mature
 WHAT?			
	Notes:		

	Nascent	Intermediate	Mature
 WHO?			
	Notes:		

	Nascent	Intermediate	Mature
 HOW?			
	Notes:		

Summary: Interpreting Your Assessment

The questions below will help you think about what you've learned through the two-part assessment above and begin to identify areas in need of attention and resources:

City Leader Questions to Consider

Did the self-assessment align with how you felt your city was executing in these areas before this exercise? If not, what changed your understanding? What surprised you?





Within the design questions (why, what, who, and how), where is your city showing strength?

Within those areas of strength, what made your city's efforts strong? Were you able to dedicate more time, resources, or staff? Did residents respond in a particularly strong way?

Have the outcomes of your civic engagement efforts matched your goals and advanced the underlying democratic principles? Have engagement processes aligned with the underlying principles related to your goals? Why or why not?

What limitations or constraints are holding back effective engagement? What resources could your city apply to overcome them?

Taking each of the key design questions in turn, use the table below to note key insights and ideas for improvement.

Question	Insights	Ideas
 WHY?		
 WHAT?		
 WHO?		
 HOW?		

Design Your Civic Engagement

This section helps you build your city's civic engagement plan using the design framework (four questions). Before beginning work on this section, make sure you have consulted with the partners and external stakeholders who will authorize, help implement, and participate in your city's civic engagement efforts to establish a baseline understanding of the key policy areas they seek to influence. It will also be useful to discuss intended outcomes (and the potential for unintended outcomes) early on with external stakeholders.

**WHY?**

Formulate concrete, compelling purposes for the engagement effort

Set transparent goals that help residents understand why you want to engage them.

Why are you asking residents to participate? Is your primary goal to:

Advance equity

Build relationships

Generate knowledge

Mobilize resources

Share power

Some combination of these five?

Elaborate:

How will you know if you are achieving your goal(s)?

How will you communicate your goal(s) to residents?



WHAT?

Be clear about the subject of the engagement effort and frame it carefully

Explain what you are asking residents to think, talk, or do something about and be clear what is and what is not within the scope of the effort.

How important is this subject of engagement (e.g., a dangerous intersection, the future of the riverfront, etc.) to residents and why?

How important is the subject to city officials and why?

How has the engagement subject been discussed and resolved (or not) in the past?

Do you hope to change the terms of the debate? Yes No If so, how will you frame the subject to accomplish that?

What role have residents had in defining, redefining, and/or refining the subject?

**WHAT?**
(cont.)

What background information might participants need in order to understand the topic?

What are you asking residents to do (e.g., give time, input, resources, expertise, etc.)?

What are your expectations?

What can residents expect to receive from you in return?

**WHO?****Identify the right groups of residents and pay attention to marginalized voices**

Ensure equitable community representation and meaningful city hall representation.

Are you hoping to engage a broad cross-section of the community or a focused subset of residents relevant to the engagement subject?

Who has been engaged on this subject in the past? Should they continue to be? Why?

Who has not been engaged but should? Why?

Who should be consulted early in the process of deciding who should be engaged?

How much latitude will these actors have to determine who participates and how?

What are the demographics of the target group, including average age and digital literacy?

**WHO?**
(cont.)

Have you asked potential participants how to make the engagement more accessible and/or inclusive?

Yes No

Elaborate:

Are there specific community leaders, business associations, voluntary civic organizations, or activists being engaged?

Yes No

Elaborate:

Are there particular dynamics between those invited to participate (both in general and in relationship to the specific topic of engagement) you should anticipate?

Yes No

Elaborate:

Is there trust or relationship building that needs to occur before moving forward with some participants?

Yes No

Elaborate:

**WHO?**
(cont.)

Who will represent city hall?

Who will facilitate?

How will the style, position, and decision-making power of the people running the engagement and/or representing city hall affect the engagement?

**HOW?****Select a mix of tools and methods that engage residents**

Optimize for functionality, accessibility, and inclusiveness.

Will you engage participants individually (e.g., surveys, interviews), in small groups (e.g., focus groups, working groups), or as a whole group (e.g., town hall meeting, online event, metaverse meetup, etc.)?

What type(s) of interaction (e.g., listening, collaborative inquiry, brainstorming, debating, voting on priorities and preferences, digital forum or discussion, game, etc.) will help you accomplish your engagement goals?

What *mix* of engagement opportunities (e.g., an open town hall forum and a Zoom event; a deliberative poll and a neighborhood listening session; a crowdfunding campaign, a digital anti-litter campaign, and an in-person clean-up-your-block rally; etc.) maximizes inclusiveness and equity as well as effectiveness and efficiency?

What kind of outreach will you do?

How will you monitor enrollment, participation, and ongoing engagement?

**HOW?**
(cont.)

How formal or informal will the terms of the engagement be?

How formal or informal will the setting for the engagement be?

How long will the engagement last?

What are the key steps at each stage?

Who holds authority over decision-making processes?

How much power or authority over public policy and decision-making is vested in the engagement process?

**HOW?**
(cont.)

How will the results inform city hall actions, decisions, or policies?

What should participants expect or not expect as a result of their engagement?

How will the city communicate decisions and outcomes back to participants and the public?

Review Your Design

City Leader Questions to Consider

Reviewing your answers to the four design questions, are there adjustments you need to make to ensure that the pieces align with one another? If so, what are they?





Will your answers to these questions help your city overcome challenges and pitfalls it has encountered in the past? How?

How will this design help to build trust between government, residents, and partner organizations? Will it serve as a basis for action-oriented partnerships and an ongoing collaborative approach to problem-solving?

Summary: Key Design Points

Now that you have thought through the major components and their alignment, below is a place for you to include your summary of your plan ahead.

Within each section, what is your top priority? Being clear about your priorities will not only help your design alignment, but it will also help you to communicate effectively with staff and residents. If possible, list a key action and a key indicator for each priority.

	Priority	Key Action	Key Indicator
 WHY?			
 WHAT?			
 WHO?			
 HOW?			
<p>Any final concerns you want to consider or remember during the next phases of your process?</p>			

Implementation: Internal Considerations

Recognizing and acknowledging the unique political and bureaucratic circumstances in your city is important in determining how to work within them. Representation, capacity, and budget can all be major factors in your ability to implement your vision.

Below are questions to help you anticipate and manage some of the internal challenges that tend to arise. Use the final table to determine who is managing what part of the process.

City Leader Questions to Consider

How does this engagement effort inform and advance city hall's priorities, and how can those priorities act as a unifying vision for collaborating between different departments?

What actors in city government outside of the mayor's office need to be involved in managing and setting priorities in order for the engagement to be effective?

Are there opportunities to embed engagement strategies, tactics, tools, and objectives into other work across councils, commissions, and boards?

Which internal allies could you partner with to expand your reach?

Who are the internal experts on the engagement subject (the "what") and how can you leverage their expertise for better outcomes?

City Leader Questions to Consider

How and where does this specific engagement plan integrate with the ongoing goals and priorities of city government?

Who from the city government is leading this initiative and who do they report to? Is this position time-bound? What training or background does that individual have in the community and with civic engagement?

Is there a budget available to advance your civic engagement goals? Do you have staff and resources to support your efforts?





Use the table below to map out internally the key actors who will carry out your civic engagement initiative.

Department or Point Person	Roles, Responsibilities, and Interdependencies


Evaluation


To evaluate your efforts, return to the development rubric in the guide and use it to reflect on progress made, see where there is room to grow, and adapt efforts as you go.


Revisit the Rubric


Questions	Nascent	Intermediate	Mature
 WHY?			
How did city hall define and measure success for civic engagement efforts?			
How did the engagement goals align with city hall's priorities?			
To what extent did residents' concerns and ideas inform engagement efforts?			
How clear were the city's goals to residents?			
 WHAT?			
How much information about the subject of engagement was available to residents?			
Who was involved in nominating, defining, and refining the subjects for engagement?			
Did the information provided make it easier for residents to contribute meaningfully?			
 WHO?			
Who was engaged?			
How diverse and representative was the group of residents who participated?			
Did voluntary civic organizations participate in the effort and work with the city to improve it?			
Who represented the city?			
 HOW?			
Did city hall expand its toolbox? Did it provide various ways to engage?			
How did city hall deal with engagement efforts initiated by residents or grassroots organizations?			
How did city hall incorporate accessibility tools and accommodations to make civic engagement inclusive?			
Were invitations clear and specific as to what was being requested of residents?			
Did city hall support and align engagement efforts across departments?			
Did city hall incorporate engagement throughout decision-making processes?			
How many channels did city hall use to communicate the engagement opportunity (or opportunities) to residents?			
How did city hall handle feedback and communicate outcomes back to residents?			

Once you have completed the rubric, consider the whole. Where did you see growth? Where is there still some misalignment? Where can you make improvements?

	Nascent	Intermediate	Mature
 WHY?			
	Notes:		

	Nascent	Intermediate	Mature
 WHAT?			
	Notes:		

	Nascent	Intermediate	Mature
 WHO?			
	Notes:		

	Nascent	Intermediate	Mature
 HOW?			
	Notes:		

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