Shaping the Future Together:
A Guide to Practical Public Engagement for Local Government

THINK   **INITIATE**   **ENGAGE**   **REVIEW**   **SHIFT**
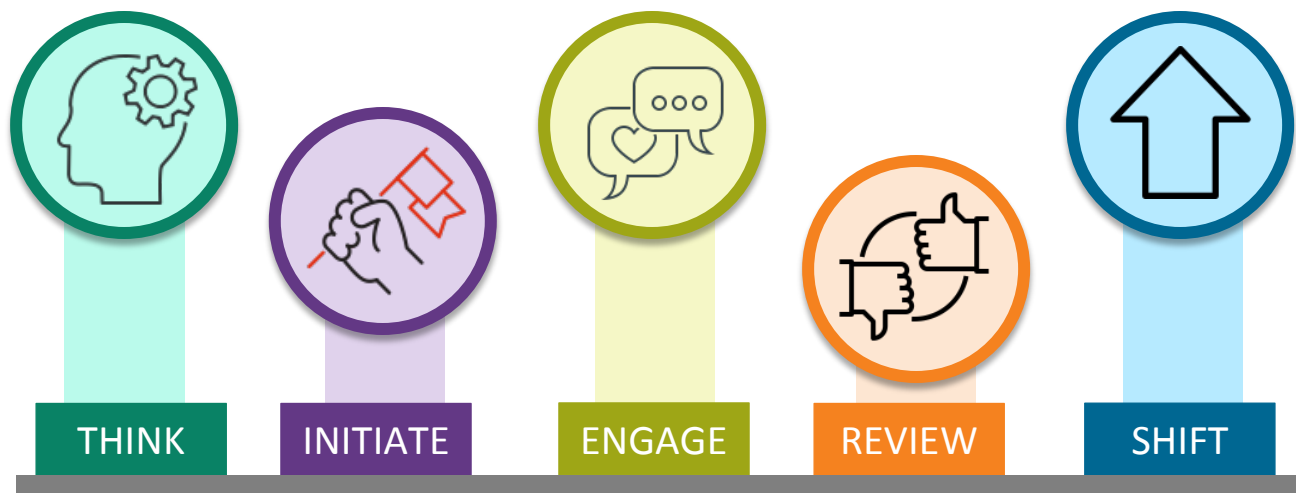
The Institute for Local Government (ILG) has developed a new framework any local government can use to plan and execute public engagement efforts. The "TIERS" framework has been developed in direct response to what we have heard from local elected officials and staff across California.

In 2015, ILG conducted a statewide survey and found that 69 percent of respondents said they do not have the sufficient staff, knowledge and financial resources for public engagement. These findings mirrored the results of a 2013 Public Agenda survey which found that 69 percent of respondents thought a lack of resources and staff could stand in the way of a deliberative [public engagement] approach.

Further, there is a lack of standard best practices for authentic and effective public engagement, which leads to a lack of common understanding of what public engagement is and how to approach it. The TIERS Framework and its companion program, the TIERS Learning Lab, provide a step by step approach to public engagement.

Local governments can benefit from public engagement in the following ways:

- Better identification of the public's values, ideas and recommendations

- More informed residents

- Improved local agency decision makings and actions, with better impacts and outcomes

- More community buy-in and support, with less contentiousness

- More civil discussion and decision making

- Faster project implementation with less need to revisit again

- More trust in each other and in local government

- Higher rates of community participation and leadership development

THINK

INITIATE

Step 1: Self-Assessment
- Public Engagement Project Assessment
  - Quick Assessment (1-4 hours)
  - Deeper Assessment (8 hrs to 6 weeks)
  - *Template Provided*
- Agency Assessment
  - Davenport Institute's "How are WE Doing?" assessment tool

Step 2: Consider Public Engagement Approach
- Draft Public Engagement Approach for Specific Effort
  - *Template Provided*
- Draft Public Engagement Approach for Agency Wide Application
  - Review agency's public engagement policies and practices, including current staffing
  - Conduct an analysis of the public engagement functions and needs across the agency

Step 3: Contemplate Community Landscape
- Create or update a list of local community based organizations (CBOs) and others to inform outreach efforts
- Identify diverse locations to hold meetings with target audiences in mind
- *Template Provided*

Step 1: Draft Public Engagement Approach
- Choose a mix of in person and online activities
  - Consider the timeline, budget, staff time implications (your department and other departments as applicable)
  - Who will facilitate events? Who/ how will data gathered be input, analyzed, summarized?
  - What might go wrong? How might your approach mitigate for challenges?
  - *Template Provided*

Step 2: Develop Outreach Plan
- Create an Outreach Plan
  - Consider what you know from your 'community landscape' listing; who you are trying to reach, how much time and money available
  - *Template Provided*

Step 3: 'Reality Check'
- Are there local, state or federal laws or regulations you need to consider?
- Are there internal organizational 'politics' or challenges to take into consideration?
- Are there larger 'Political' issues to keep in mind?
  - For example: Is an election near? A significant recent incident?

"Society is strongest when we all have a voice. Engaged communities are often more vibrant and healthier."
- The James Irvine Foundation

ENGAGE

Step 1: Implement Outreach Plan
- Implement your plan, prioritizing outreach
- Ensure targeted audiences are represented (authentically) within your plan
  - Double check with local leaders to ensure authentic voices are reached

Step 2: Implement Public Engagement Approach
- Execute your plan; ensure roles are clear; adjust as appropriate
- Template Provided

Step 3: 'Reality Check'
- Are there internal organizational 'politics' or challenges that have changed and need to be considered?
- Check in with key community leaders on a regular basis to understand new or coming issues; mitigate accordingly

REVIEW

### Step 1: Evaluate Public Engagement Approach
- What worked? What could have gone better? See ILG resources like Rapid Review Worksheets
- Is training needed for any staffers in order to execute more effectively in the future? (e.g. facilitation skills; graphic design; survey question construction; meeting design)

Step 2: Evaluate Outreach Plan
- What worked? What could have gone better?
- Is training needed for any staffers in order to execute more effectively in the future? (e.g. challenging people; communications skills; small group facilitation)
- Are there community leaders who the agency should build stronger ties with?

Step 3: What Barriers Did You Overcome?
- What internal organizational barriers did you overcome?
- What other political barriers did you overcome?
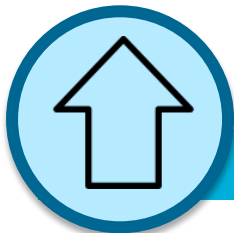
SHIFT

Step 1: Internal Organizational
- Consider beneficial organizational shifts
  - For example: public engagement assigned within job description(s); commitment to train electeds and staff in public engagement policy and/or skills; ongoing communication strategies that go beyond traditional methods such as ethnic media;
  - Send out periodic surveys to understand satisfaction with public engagement related efforts and policies
  - Ask for help when needed from organizations like ILG, Davenport Institute and/or consultants

Step 2: External |Your Community
- Consider beneficial shifts in external relations
  - For example: Set and track metrics related to in-person and phone meetings with diverse and underrepresented community members, choose time bound goals; engage with local leadership programs

Step 3: Policy Change
- Consider policy review/ change/ adoption
  - Commitment to review public engagement related policies if they have not been systematically reviewed in the last ten years; Adopt a resolution demonstrating commitment to public engagement

TIERS Learning Lab

In the TIERS Learning Lab local government elected officials and staff will:

- Learn to utilize a step-by-step framework to successfully plan and implement public engagement – whether it's a one-time single event or an ongoing, holistic approach.
- Discuss strategies to overcome a wide variety of barriers and challenges often seen in public engagement work.
- Work through a relevant, local public engagement example to better understand resource related choices (e.g., staffing, money, time).
- Connect with others from cities, counties and special districts in the region to provide mutual support for successful public engagement efforts.

Benefit from customized technical assistance and coaching before, during and after the Learning Lab.

To learn more about the TIERS Learning Lab and other training opportunities in your region or to learn how ILG can come to you, please contact Madeline Henry at mhenry@ca-ilg.org.

About the Institute for Local Government

The Institute for Local Government's (ILG) mission is to promote good government at the local level with practical, impartial and easy-to-use resources for California communities. ILG is the nonprofit 501(c)(3) research and education affiliate of the League of California Cities, the California State Association of Counties and the California Special Districts Association.

To access the Institute's resources on public engagement, visit www.ca-ilg.org/engagement