

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

TIERS FRAMEWORK



THINK



INITIATE



ENGAGE



REVIEW



SHIFT

The Institute for Local Government (ILG) has developed a framework to support and assist any local government with planning and executing public engagement efforts. The Framework consists of five pillars for successful community engagement: Think, Initiate, Engage, Review and Shift.

Why TIERS? The TIERS Public Engagement 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 ILG & 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 Public Engagement Framework and its companion program, the TIERS Training, provide a step-by-step approach to public engagement.

How Can Your Agency Benefit from Public Engagement?

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

- Improved local agency decision making and actions, with better impacts and outcomes
- More community buy-in and support, with less contentiousness
- Better identification of the public's values, ideas and recommendations
- More informed residents
- More constructive 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

Step 1: Self-Assessment

- Public engagement project assessment
 - Quick Assessment (1 - 4 hours)
 - Deeper Assessment (8 hours - 6 weeks)
 - *Template provided*
- Agency assessment

Step 2: Consider Public Engagement Approach

- Draft public engagement approach for your specific effort
 - *Template provided*
- Draft public engagement approach for agency-wide application
 - Review your agency's public engagement policies and practices, including current staffing
 - Conduct an analysis of the public engagement functions and needs across your 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*



INITIATE

Step 1: Develop 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 there an upcoming election? 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., communications skills, small group facilitation)
- Are there community leaders with whom the agency should build stronger ties?

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 elected officials 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 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
- Commit 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

TIERSSM Public Engagement Training

The TIERS Public Engagement Training is an interactive, results-oriented 2-day training led by ILG that provides participants in California local government with hands-on instructions, exclusive TIERS public engagement tools, individualized support of your public engagement project and follow up peer-to-peer learning.

Training Benefits and Takeaways:

- Learn how to apply the TIERS public engagement framework to develop an inclusive and equitable public engagement plan that fits your budget, timelines and public engagement goals
- Learn how to reframe your public engagement messaging by focusing on community values and the benefits of engagement
- Learn new strategies and tactics for how to reach and involve traditionally under-engaged residents
- Learn how to choose digital tools and platforms that work for your process and your community to get the public input that you need
- Learn how to design engaging, fun and dialogue-focused public workshops
- Learn from other local governments and what worked in their communities.
- Receive a copy of the TIERS Training Digital Workbook
- Join the TIERS peer learning community through ongoing virtual meet-ups
- Gain access to ILG “Office Hours” to receive technical assistance to tackle your public engagement challenges

To learn more about the TIERS Training and other in-person and virtual public engagement and outreach training opportunities, please contact ILG’s Public Engagement Program at publicengagement@ca-ilg.org

About the Institute for Local Government

The Institute for Local Government’s (ILG) empowers local government leaders and delivers real-world expertise to help them navigate complex issues, increase their capacity, and build trust in their 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

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