OPPORTUNITY FOR CHANGE

Public meetings often do not meet the needs of residents or local officials.

Large segments of the public are missing, especially low-income populations, immigrants and young people.

Many desire broad-based public participation and stronger collaboration.

LOCAL PUBLIC OFFICIALS (SELECTED AND NONSELECTED)

Appreciate the value of public engagement

77% are interested in hearing more about practices that have worked in other places.

Feel local officials want to see improved public engagement

View the public as disengaged

87% say that community members are too busy with day-to-day life to get involved in public decision making.

Endorse more deliberative processes, but are cautious

67% believe deliberative engagement can bring out fresh ideas, 60% think such approaches should be used for only a few public decisions.

Want more thoughtful, inclusive processes that foster dialogue, trust and better decisions

Support more deliberative processes, but worry about lack of follow through

83% think such approaches can result in better understanding of public concerns, 38% believe these processes may frustrate participants if officials don’t act on the results.

LOCAL PUBLIC OFFICIALS (ELECTED AND NONSELECTED) BOTH GROUPS

Report that many local officials are trying to improve public engagement

41% say local officials seem to be making more of an effort to engage a wide variety of people.

Leaders of civic and community organizations

Find the relationship between the public and local government is deeply strained

77% say the public has become angrier and less trusting of local officials in recent years.

SING S OF PROGRESS

53% of local public officials have collaborated with community organizations to engage residents in dialogue.

61% of civic leaders say that working with a local official has been effective in building community trust.

90% of local public officials can think of an issue that lends itself well to deeper engagement, such as:

- Finances and budgets
- Land use, housing and economic development
- Long-term community goal setting

TAKING ACTION FOR STRONGER PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Local officials and their organizations can gain from:

- Partnering with community-based organizations
- Hiring and training staff to increase public engagement skills
- Networking with colleagues who have effective practices
- Evaluating local efforts

Civic leaders and their organizations can gain from:

- Partnering with local officials
- Hiring and training staff to increase public engagement skills
- Networking and sharing resources with other organizations
- Evaluating local efforts

Leaders of civic and community organizations

- Facilitate communication with the public, they typically have little experience with this type of engagement.
- In their ability to effectively implement a deliberative approach tentatively. Nonetheless, for all three major benefits, another large group (47 percent) say the public has become angrier and less trusting of local officials in recent years.

Funders can make a difference by supporting:

- Partnerships between public officials and local organizations
- Trainings and technical assistance
- Experiments, including use of online engagement tools
- Research, evaluation and knowledge sharing

Among the research, survey and qualitative research conducted in 2012 with local public officials in California (selected and nonselected from cities and counties) and leaders of civic and community-based organizations interested in engaging residents on local issues.