

Evaluation of Institute for Local Government's Public Engagement Program

from Inception to Present (2005 – 2015)

Companion Narrative

The Future of Public Engagement

Work conducted January 2015 through December 2015 through generous funding by
The James Irvine Foundation

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

The Institute's program areas include:

Public Engagement
Collaboration and Partnerships
Ethics and Transparency
Sustainable Communities
Local Government Basics

ILG Public Engagement Program

The Program was originally established as the Collaborative Governance Initiative in 2005. Terry Amsler was the Director of the Program from 2005 to 2013. Amsler was with the Program through March 2015.

The overarching goal of the ILG Public Engagement (PE) program is to imbed effective and inclusive public engagement practices that encourage data-driven and representative local decision-making. To achieve this we:

- Encourage the experimentation and use of public engagement tools and strategies in local communities by elected officials, staff and residents; and
- Foster greater inclusion of those frequently under-represented in local public engagement efforts through more responsive and targeted processes and cross-sector partnerships.

As used throughout this report, public engagement is defined as:

"A broad range of methods through which members of the public become more informed about and/or influence public decisions."

Project Staffing

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Introduction

This narrative report details the efforts of the Institute for Local Government's (ILG) Public Engagement Program evaluation effort conducted in 2015. The major undertaking, with generous support from The James Irvine Foundation (JIF), was a comprehensive evaluation of the ILG's Public Engagement (PE) Program from its inception in 2005 to present (2015). The effort was executed in collaboration with evaluation consultants Deb Marois, MS, of Converge CRT and Adele James, MA, CPC, of Adele James Consulting. The Institute's Public Engagement Program intern Madeline Henry and Converge CRT intern Vikram Ravi and data analyst Gwyn Pasquale made invaluable contributions. Marios and James' final report entitled, *A Spectrum of Impact: Ten Years of Moving the Needle on Local Government Public Engagement in California* was submitted to the JIF January 31, 2016.

The companion infographic "Future of Public Engagement Work" can be viewed at www.ca-ilg.org/PE2015Evaluation. The infographic summarizes the potential "next steps" for ILG's Public Engagement Program.

Findings: Suggested Future Work for the ILG Public Engagement Program

The ten area for potential future focus of ILG's Public Engagement Program, per Evaluation Consultants James & Marois, are detailed as follows:

Maximize relationships with parent organizations to achieve shared goals

- a. Enhance collaboration to better inform local officials about The Institute programs and resources
- b. Design and convene professional development sessions to address common priorities that cut across jurisdictions/organizations and to share best practices and how to's
- c. Develop case studies that focus on county and special district public engagement
- d. Offer consistent training at League, CSAC, CSDA conferences/events
- e. Increase The Institute promotion through parent organization communication channels
- f. Undertake new research on topics of interest to parent organizations including tracking public engagement mandates

Increase in-person outreach to discover local government needs and how the Institute can assist

- a. Schedule 1-on-1 meetings with board chairs, CAOs, and city managers
- b. Attend regional meetings, e.g. Regional CAO meetings

Establish new cross-sector partnerships to expand effective public engagement practices

- a. Partner with universities to train new leaders and continue “cultural shift” towards effective, inclusive public engagement
- b. Develop a structured, intentional, statewide public engagement learning community
- c. Enhance accessibility/relevance of educational materials for CBOs to equip them with resources to effectively advocate for robust public engagement practices
- d. Partner with CBOs and associations to extend reach to new audiences and develop more effective engagement strategies and practices, e.g., advocacy, grassroots, social justice, criminal justice and ethnic groups integrating public engagement in accessible social settings (such as parent cafes, farmer’s markets, parks)
- e. Explore opportunities to coordinate with JIF’s Advancing Democracy in California initiative for maximum synergy among existing efforts

Move towards more consultative role with local government

- a. Conduct internal assessments to improve public engagement practices
- b. Offer structured meetings and peer mentor networks for public officials to explore public engagement practices, ask candid questions and learn in a safe space
 - a. Partner with Davenport Institute to train newly elected officials with focus on mentoring, peer-to-peer learning and networks
- c. Package services with demographers to meet California Voting Rights Act requirements
- d. Assist with crisis prevention and resolution of difficult issues such as litigation, corruption, bankruptcy, and conflict
- e. Strategically deploy Public Engagement Champions and trained non-partisan consultants to assist local government with public engagement efforts

Increase promotion and distribution of Public Engagement Program messages and projects

- a. Identify intended audience for content
- b. Employ regular, targeted dissemination utilizing professional networks
- c. Make it easy to cut through the information “clutter” and static
 - a. Blast short, weekly newsletters with features/provocative questions that highlight new programs, research, case studies and link to The Institute’s resources
 - b. Automatic subscriptions to The Institute’s newsletter following training, webinars
 - c. Increase social media use/reach by connecting virtually with cities, associations
- d. Use video to enhance outreach and engagement across multiple topics
- e. Offer a clearinghouse of ideas with improved website navigability
 - a. Create shorter, more user-friendly summaries
 - b. Revamp most popular/needed topic areas based on data/input
- f. Explore partnering with ethnic media and CBOs for public engagement promotion and education, e.g., Univision

- g. Increase public relations and marketing efforts through strategic communications and targeted outreach, for example by increasing media attention via press releases, news articles, and/or Op-Eds and partnering with entities such as:
 - a. Associations: CA Transit Association, Public Relations Society
 - b. Regional groups: COGS, Self-Help Counties Coalition
 - c. Magazines: Public Management, Governing

Expand public engagement program training and develop new tools

- a. Train staff of as well as elected officials, and community members in effective public engagement
- b. Host webinars as cost effective means of reaching local governments
- c. Recommend best technology tools for public engagement
- d. Develop more public engagement resources including:
 - a. Testimonials of successful public engagement
 - b. TED Talks-style web-based videos
 - c. Best practices tip sheets and step-by-step “how to’s” for avoiding pitfalls
 - d. Tool kits for emerging issues with shorter more user-friendly educational materials
 - e. Interactive products branded specifically as a resource for public agencies
- e. Train non-partisan consultants to work with municipalities

Embed public engagement practices in local government

- a. Clearly define public engagement as distinguished from public information
- b. Work with city clerks (or other “gatekeepers”) to distribute public engagement materials to candidates, newly elected and appointed officials – frame as leadership skill
- c. Design a compelling package for newly electeds to help them think creatively about their new duties related to public engagement, answer FAQs and demonstrate how public engagement translates into better, more responsive government
- d. Target staff for education given their role/function in implementing public engagement
- e. Build a case for embedding public engagement through collaboration with public engagement managers to support their role and document lessons learned. Partner with Santa Rosa, Morgan Hill
- f. Establish Public Engagement Commissions to support accountability for relationship building and communication
- g. Establish Public Engagement Awards Program: Create a recognition program to highlight successful public engagement efforts

Establish rigorous internal agency-wide evaluation systems

- a. Centralized systems to track and evaluate all The Institute publications - not just by program

- b. Systematically document staff time, products, and results for all programs
- c. Consistently evaluate Public Engagement Program effectiveness and impact
- d. Partner with field leaders to identify metrics and systems to capture impacts
- e. Continue periodic public engagement statewide surveys

Stabilize and diversify funding

- a. Explore how to fund the Public Engagement Program over long-term by demonstrating its value in local government and connection to philanthropy's goals/constituents
 - i. Propose a Council on Foundations panel to raise awareness and share learning
 - ii. Identify areas of need and interest to funders, CBOs and consultants, and expand services to include these target audiences
- b. Increase direct technical assistance/consultation/facilitation as an income source
- c. Explore potential public engagement funding resulting from policy mandates such as:
 - i. Utilization of public engagement in periodic planning processes as required by city, county, special districts, local education agencies, joint authorities, regional and state entities
 - ii. Metropolitan Transportation Plans (MTP): Multi-lingual public engagement required
 - iii. Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP): Updates require public engagement
 - iv. Mental Health Services Act (MHSA): County plans require public engagement
 - v. Climate Change: AB32 Scoping Plans, SB375

Develop new resources that focus on emerging issue areas ripe for public engagement

- a. Use of technology to enhance public engagement
 - i. Openness of data sources; accessibility/readability
 - ii. Partner with Code for America to better integrate technology with in-person public engagement
- b. Other topics: electoral/voting; land use & planning, transportation & infrastructure; equity/disparities; policing/safety; housing; budgeting/finance; health/social services delivery; education; immigration; climate action/environmental justice

Conclusion

For more information, visit <http://www.ca-ilg.org/PE2015Evaluation> or contact publicengagement@ca-ilg.org.