

# Evaluation of Institute for Local Government's Public Engagement Program

from Inception to Present (2005 – 2015)

Companion Narrative

## What We Did and What We Learned

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

February 2016

This report presents a description of activities and funds accounting for work carried out by the Institute for Local Government under a grant from The James Irvine Foundation. The work was conducted from January 2015 until December 2015.

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

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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 "What We Did and What We Learned" can be viewed at [www.ca-ilg.org/PE2015Evaluation](http://www.ca-ilg.org/PE2015Evaluation). The infographic summarizes stakeholder involvement and results of our resource inventory, which looks at all PE Program products from 2005 to 2015.

## Summary

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### What We Did

The 2015 ILG evaluation effort resulted in the PE Program substantively connecting with 343 stakeholders through a statewide survey, confidential interviews, facilitated discussions and focus groups. Over 500 resources were documented within our inventory of resources, including 335 publications and 203 conference sessions and workshops.

The approach used by our consultants to understand programmatic impact of the ILG PE Program was a multi-lens theoretical approach. The three frameworks that informed their approach, in addition to the PE Program Logic Model, were: the Prevention Institute's Spectrum of Prevention; Results Based Accountability; and Collective Impact. These conceptual models help to explain the complex process by which societal change occurs. The overall common thread is that no one intervention or organization is able to single-handedly shift norms or create population level change.

A combination of these frameworks resulted in five questions which guided the overall evaluation design and process:

1. What was produced, why, and what was the outcome?
2. What changes occurred in local government and public engagement?
3. What new relationships were established?
4. How were relationships strengthened?
5. What are the lessons learned from ILG's PE Program work?

## What We Learned

The findings from the evaluation report are summarized below.

### *Major Overarching Findings*

1. *ILG and its PE Program offer significant strengths and face some important challenges.* ILG exhibits characteristics of a mature organization while also in the midst of renewal, growth and even some start-up activities.
2. *The PE Program's logic model represents a sound theoretical basis for its program activities, which are achieving the intended outcomes.* The assessment validates the theory of change, confirming the appropriateness of the range of activities needed to support meaningful public engagement in local governance decisions.
3. *ILG and the PE Program are far-reaching in terms of diversity of resources, issues addressed, geography covered and jurisdictions represented.* However, there is ample room for growth and to become a more widely-known "go to" resource.
4. *The public engagement field is still developing.* During the last eight years, ILG contributed to the field's growth – though often isn't known or credited outside its immediate sphere of influence.
5. *While local governments in California have made strides toward more inclusive public engagement in decision-making, they consistently identify significant challenges.* Expectations and requirements for public engagement in local government decision-making have increased without the corresponding supports and resources for effective implementation.
6. *ILG is uniquely positioned to expand training and technical assistance to local governments in California.* There are ample opportunities for public engagement in a wide range of issue areas, some with policy mandates. However, local government still frequently views public engagement as appropriate for a limited range of issues. The intersection of public engagement with advances in technology is an emerging area of practice that is ripe for pursuit by ILG.

The James Irvine Foundation invested nearly \$3 million (\$2,996,000) in the program over eight years. More than \$1 million additional funds were raised since the inception of the program. These investments resulted in groundbreaking projects in California with national impact. 46% of the non-JIF funds supported immigrant engagement/ integration/ welcoming work.

### *Impact*

Examples of the impact of specific PE Program activities detailed in the evaluation report that contributed to shifts in public engagement practices among local government in California include:

- Leveraged funding to expand public engagement in several issue areas, most notably immigrant integration/welcoming, youth engagement and technology;
- Generated 335 educational publications and provided 203 training opportunities;
- Provided on-the-ground consultation services to local governments, resulting in demonstration projects that introduce new practices, produce outcomes, shift norms and provide examples others can learn from and replicate;

- Established new professional networks devoted to enhancing public engagement in local government in California;
- Pursued outreach and communication strategies through networks with the potential to reach more than 70,000 people; and
- Offered an equipment loan program to increase access to public engagement technology that would otherwise be unavailable due to expense. The equipment allows greater participation among non- and limited-English speaking community members.

ILG organizational and PE Program strengths include:

- Reputation for experienced, informed and skilled staff. The PE Program is known nationally as the most robust entity of its type. The organization is a nonpartisan convener with unique local government expertise and an emphasis on government ethics.
- Extended credibility and reach through association with parent organizations. The built-in audience gives ILG unique access to multiple levels of local government.
- ILG produces durable, multi-issue educational resources to support effective local government.
- ILG operates a robust PE Program. The program informs, impacts and adds value to the public engagement field.

ILG organizational and PE Program challenges include:

- Underdeveloped organizational systems and structure.
- Communicating effectively and regularly with stakeholders.
- The threat of a “default future.”
- Challenges in the field of public engagement effect program delivery.

The report includes a section on local government and the current state of the field of Public Engagement; highlights include:

#### *Local Government Public Engagement Challenges*

- Leadership and cultural change needed to overcome risk aversion, fear and perceptions that people don’t care.
- Lack of staff, time and/or financial resources – public engagement is not funded as a core service.
- Lack of knowledge about best practices and evaluation tools.
- Extensive expectations and mandates that are burdensome and hard to meet without expertise.
- Expanding participation beyond the “usual suspects.”
- Educating the public about complex issues and how government works.
- Translation is often required and expensive; difficult to accommodate the more than 200 languages spoken throughout California.

#### *Local Government Public Engagement Strengths*

- There is a growing consensus on the need and value of public engagement in local decision making for a range of issues.
- Many local government officials are eager to learn new skills and methods.
- Local governments are increasingly making information more accessible through multi-lingual translation and use of technology.

- More partnerships with community-based organizations on outreach and education that involves more diverse populations and expands bandwidth.
- Shift towards more two-way communication, e.g., listening vs. informing.
- Some infrastructure and models for sustained public engagement established, for example advisory boards, commissions, public engagement managers/staff.

#### *Areas of Local Government Interest and Opportunity for ILG's PE Program*

- Increase public engagement capacity through training and consultation. This includes site visits, audience specific materials, trainings and orientations for elected and appointed officials.
- Continue the “cultural shift” and changing norms to move towards more sustained and inclusive public engagement.
- Support public engagement in diverse issue areas common across the jurisdiction. These areas include: parks and recreation, land use and planning, transportation and infrastructure, law enforcement/policing, housing, electoral/voting, budgeting/finance, health/social services delivery, education and immigrant integration.
- Explore new issue areas of interest to special districts. These areas include: rate increases, infrastructure, public works contracting issues, pensions, unions, transparency and accountability; develop new, relevant case stories.
- Expand use of technology to widen reach and connection to constituents.

#### *Recommendations for the Future (both internal organizational and PE Program)*

- Stabilize and diversify funding for ILG's PE Program.
- Establish rigorous agency-wide evaluation systems.
- Maximize relationship with parent organizations to achieve shared goals.
- Expand PE Program training and develop new tools.
- Increase in-person outreach to discover local government needs and how ILG can assist.
- Move towards more consultative role with local government.
- Embed public engagement practices in local government.
- Establish new cross-sector partnerships to expand effective public engagement practices.
- Develop new resources that focus on emerging issue areas ripe for public engagement.
- Increase promotion and distribution of ILG/PE Program messages and products.

Below more detail is found on our engagement with stakeholders and what we learned in the resource evaluation.

## **How We Connected with Stakeholders**

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The evaluation effort connected with over 354 stakeholders. We connected with individuals through the following methods:

- Confidential interviews
- Statewide electronic survey
- National scan of the public engagement field
- Facilitated discussions
- Focus groups

ILG worked with the consultant team to collaboratively develop data collection instruments and engage stakeholders. With consultant guidance, staff designed and administered the statewide electronic survey, facilitated focus groups and identified key informants. The consultants conducted the confidential key informant interviews. The consultant team also reviewed a variety of internal background documents such as plans, proposals, grant reports, financial records and previous evaluations and surveys along with materials produced by ILG for the public.

## Confidential Interviews

Consultants conducted all the confidential interviews using semi-structured question guides and analyzed responses for common themes as well as unique ideas.

The many local officials and community leaders who offered their expertise and perspective to inform this assessment, especially those who so graciously contributed their time to participate in key informant interviews and focus groups include:

- Terry Amsler, Founder/Former Public Engagement Program Manager, The Institute for Local Government
- Jennifer Armer, Former Sustainability Program Coordinator, The Institute for Local Government
- Ginny Browne, The Participatory Budgeting Project
- Greg Cox, The Institute for Local Government Board President; Former California State Association of Counties
- Rod Gould, The Institute for Local Government Board Member
- Annelise Grimm, The James Irvine Foundation, California Democracy Initiative
- Mahvash Hassan, Consultant, Immigrant Integration
- Ed Honowitz, Education Policy Advisor, State Senator Carol Liu
- Graham Knaus, California State Association of Counties
- Matt Leighneger, Deliberative Democracy Consortium
- Connie Malloy, The James Irvine Foundation
- Neil McCormick, California Special District Association
- Chris McKenzie, League of California Cities
- Maggie Mejia, Latino Community Roundtable - Stanislaus
- Pete Peterson, Davenport Institute
- Maryn Pitt, City of Turlock
- JoAnne Spears, Former Executive Director, Institute for Local Government
- Susan Stuart Clark, Common Knowledge Group
- Christine Tien, The California Endowment
- Linsey Willis, Contra Costa Transportation Agency

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## Statewide Electronic Survey

ILG's statewide electronic survey is detailed in a companion narrative report entitled "Statewide Electronic Survey Results." It can be found at [www.ca-ilg.org/PE2015Evaluation](http://www.ca-ilg.org/PE2015Evaluation). Two hundred and sixty four stakeholders completed the survey, representing 42 of California's 58 counties. In addition, over 300 respondents started a survey. The survey provided us with insight on the impact of the program. For



example, 83 percent of those who had participated in an ILG learning opportunity reported that it increased knowledge and/or capacity to engage people (96/115). Impacts included change in awareness and use of public engagement techniques, more skills for effective engagement, increased confidence, use of public engagement for a wider range of issues, and greater attention to those participating and missing from public engagement processes.

The survey also helped us realize what is valued in the field and how we can best reach individuals. Respondents preferred to receive information via online resources, short 2-4 page tip sheets, webinars, workshops or trainings, conference sessions or via in person technical assistance. Respondents found information on what peers in their region are doing, general “how to” guides and case stories the most helpful.

Two additional key findings include:

- Majority worry that it’s always the same people who participate and they tend to be extremists (83 percent); and
- There is concern that local governments do not have sufficient staff, knowledge and financial resources for PE and residents are not adequately informed of issues (69 percent).

## Nationwide Scan of Similar Organizations

The purpose of this effort was to identify and survey comparable public engagement organizations, both in California and nationally. The scan of the field effort began with a list of similar organizations that former PE Program Director T. Amsler started (and was last dated 2009). That initial list was circulated to a subset of ILG’s PE Panel of Advisors members to ask ‘who’s missing.’ Those responses were collated, all organizations were researched and a new list was prepared. This list was divided into two categories: “likely we should include in survey” and “likely there will not be enough resources to include in survey.” This list was again circulated to the PE POA and the PE Champions. They were asked to rank each organization on a 1-3 scale of “important to include.” Those results were tallied and the list of interviewees was finalized. It was harder than expected to connect with some of the organizations. Quite a few themes did emerge and overall the effort was valuable, both in what we learned, including some themes that validate other evaluation component findings, and in the networking that resulted from the effort.

This narrative report includes areas that were found to be most salient along with a short list of additional key themes. The highlighted responses are from the following questions:

- What do you do?
- What issues do you work on?
- Are you evaluating your impact?
- How are you examining your theory to practice loop?
- How are you funded?
- Issues to watch in the coming five years?
- What are you trying to accomplish?

### *What do you do?*

About 60 percent of interviewees do on-the-ground work, with 90 percent of respondents providing some kind of training, coaching or leadership development. Key elements of what respondents say they

do includes: working on “tough” or “wicked” problems; experimenting with design and being nimble; exploring public /private partnerships, coaching and teaching as a means to an end of capacity building.

*What issues do you work on?*

Issues respondents work on (in alphabetical order that they named) include:

- Bike master plans,
- Built environment,
- Campaigns,
- Climate change,
- Community resilience,
- Community design,
- Disabilities,
- Education,
- Energy,
- Environment,
- Economic development,
- Economic and political inequality,
- Environmental justice,
- General plans,
- Governance,
- Green infrastructure,
- Health,
- Housing,
- Higher education,
- K-12 education,
- Land use planning,
- Parks and recreation,
- Patient engagement,
- Physical design,
- Post crisis,
- Poverty,
- [Prison] realignment,
- Rural issues,
- Sustainability, and
- Voting.

*Are you evaluating your impact?*

All respondents reported that they would like to do more, and/or more robust evaluation, and that the challenge to executing this task is funding. Forty percent of respondents are not doing evaluation of their programmatic work / programs. Fifty percent of respondents do typically conduct post-intervention surveys (not robust) and/or conduct robust evaluation on an episodic basis when funding is obtained. In hindsight this question was not framed explicitly enough as some respondents talked about project specific evaluation and some programmatic evaluation. Overall, there was consensus that this is an area of the field that is underfunded; there were not many ideas on how to change that. [Post-survey note: Since conducting the survey, ILG’s Program Manager has learned about the Deliberative Democracy Consortium’s efforts to bridge the gap between research and practice through (episodic) convenings and annually (to some degree) through the Frontiers of Democracy conference held at Tufts University each June. This finding will be shared with the survey participants – although at least a few are already aware.]

*How are you examining your theory to practice loop?*

If we consider both those who said they do make an effort to consider “what’s working” and “what could we do better” along with those who more formally examine their theory to practice loop, all but one interviewee makes some effort. The one interviewee who reported no examination of his organization’s theory to practice loop is actually a leader in the field, an author, and was probably being too modest and/or intuiting a higher implied standard in the question posed than some of the other respondents. Two interviewees are actually examining and being explicit about their model and what might be refined.

### *How are you funded?*

The respondents shared a major commonality in that all but one sought grant funds. Most seek funds from both national organizations and local or regionally focused foundations. Foundations reported that had or were currently funding respondents included: Ford, Gates, Hewlett, James Irvine, Kellogg, Kettering (many respondents) Mott, Omidyar, Pew, Whitman Institute.

One respondent funds their program exclusively through contracts, which includes training (mostly of state agency /municipal government folks) and direct service. Two respondents also receive support from their universities and one has an endowment. Some have sponsors underwrite events.

### *Issues to watch in coming 5 years*

Issues identified included:

- Income inequality,
- Budgeting (municipal budgets generally, pensions),
- Legal barriers (to public engagement),
- Health (data, privacy, patient best practices),
- Health in built environment,
- General plan design process,
- Green infrastructure,
- Cap and trade,
- Groundwater,
- Land use,
- Police and community relations,
- Environmental issues, and
- Transportation issues.

*Quotes from “What are you trying to accomplish?”*

“Trying to get closer to deliberative democracy”

“Building capacity in my community/country”

“How to understand a community deeply and change the internal structure to have a greater impact”

“Advancing theory and practice of democracy”

“On the ground engagement work”

“Support collaboration in deliberative democracy field in both theory and practice”

“Connecting the field –broadly defined – and providing tools and resources”

“Contemplating how to advance the field”

“Strengthening democracy by involving everyday citizens”

“Fostering innovation in environmental sustainability; transforming communities”

“Breaking gridlock, rebuilding relationships”

“Coordinating state, local and regional action”

“Engagement across public and private sectors”

“Strengthening relationships to instill professional level management”

“Providing mediation and facilitation services for public and private sectors”

“Support and promote greater citizen participation in decisions that affect everyday lives”

*Other key themes:*

- Tension between executing funded work and having the time to seek new funds; the lag time that is often seen is very hard on organizations (and contributes to the challenge of reflective practice / evaluation)
- Importance of a practitioner support network
- Community member/ stakeholder burn out. This issue isn't discussed that robustly in the field
- Important to share lessons learned with national audience
- California's public engagement requirements (Bagley Keene, Brown Act) sometimes discourage authentic engagement

One interesting meta outcome was a new understanding of where ILG's PE Program sits within the 'field.' The PE Program seems to straddle at least four overlapping fields-- (from an academic point of view) public engagement, deliberative democracy, conflict resolution, civic engagement. In most of the coaching or strategic assistance the Program provides to local California governments a strong 'dash' of organizational development is also present.

Those interviewed included (in alphabetical order by organization):

- California Forward, James P. Mayer, President & CEO
- Center for Public Deliberation, Martin Carcasson, Founder & Director
- Davenport Institute, Pete Peterson, Executive Director and Ashley Trim, Assistant Director

- Deliberative Democracy Consortium, Matt Leighninger, Executive Director
- Harwood Institute of Public Innovation, Mike Wood, Vice President of Strategic Partnerships
- International City/County Management Association, Kevin Duggan, West Coast Regional Director
- Jefferson Center, Kyle Bozentko, Executive Director
- Local Government Commission, Paul Zykofsky, Associate Director
- National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation, Courtney Breese, Program Director
- Public Agenda, Matt Leighninger, Director of Public Engagement
- UC Davis Conflict Resolution and Collaboration Center, Tara Zagofsky, Director

## Facilitated Discussions

The consultant team facilitated two structured discussions to gather input on both the evaluation effort itself, opinions on the field of public engagement as well as the ILG PE Program. A total of 26 people were included in these discussions. One discussion was with ILG's Board. The Board includes:

- Chair and California State Association of Counties Liaison, Greg Cox, First District Supervisor, County of San Diego
- Vice Chair, Henry L. Gardner, Retired City Manager, Oakland
- Teresa Acosta, Public Affairs Manager, Madaffer Enterprises, Inc.
- Michele Bagneris, City Attorney/City Prosecutor, City of Pasadena
- County Administrative Officers Association of California Liaison, Patrick S. Blacklock, County Executive Officer, Yolo County
- Matt Cate, Executive Director, California State Association of Counties
- Brett Channing, Assistant to the City Manager, El Cajon
- Hal Conklin, Former Mayor, Santa Barbara
- California State Association of Counties Liaison, Greg Cox, First District Supervisor, County of San Diego
- Alan Fernandes, Executive Vice President, CSAC Finance Corporation
- Mark S. Gaughan, Genesee Group
- Rod Gould, Former City Manager, Santa Monica
- Municipal Management Association of Southern California Liaison and President, Alma Janababab
- League of California Cities Board Liaison, Michael Kasperzak, Council Member, Mountain View
- James Keene, City Manager, Palo Alto
- Neil McCormick, Chief Executive Officer, California Special Districts Association
- Chris McKenzie, Executive Director, League of California Cities
- Daniel T. Miller, Senior Vice President, The Irvine Company
- Steve A. Perez, President, California Special Districts Association
- City Managers Department Liaison, Oliver Chi, City Manager, City of Monrovia
- Municipal Management Association of Northern California Liaison and President, Ryan De Vore, Director of Community Development, City of Sacramento
- Lydia Romero, City Manager, Lemon Grove
- Art Takahara, President, De Anza Manufacturing Services Inc., Former Mayor, Mountain View
- Casey Tanaka, Mayor, Coronado

The second facilitated discussion was with the ILG Public Engagement Panel of Advisors. The POA includes:

- Rubin Abrica, Former Mayor, East Palo Alto
- Terry Amsler, Program Director Emeritus, ILG Public Engagement Program
- Lynne Ashbeck, Councilmember, Clovis
- Alissa Black, Investment Principal, Omidyar Network
- Stanley Caldwell, Board Member, Mountain View Sanitary District
- Gladys Coil, Administrative Manager-Clerk of the Board, County of Napa
- Hal Conklin, Former Mayor, Santa Barbara
- Terry Cooper, Ph.D., The Maria B. Crutcher Professor in Citizenship and Democratic Values Director, Civic Engagement Initiative USC Sol Price School of Public Policy
- Oscar E. Cruz, President & CEO, Families in Schools
- Terry Dugan, Former Director, Education League of California Cities
- Caroline Farrell, Executive Director, Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment
- Sharon Friedrichsen, Public Services Director, Carmel-by-the-Sea
- Jeri Fujimoto, Former Recreation Supervisor, San Carlos
- Victoria Galvin, Account Manager, TelePacific Communications
- Jason Giffen, Environmental and Land Use Management Director, San Diego Unified Port District
- Kristine Guerrero, Regional Public Affairs Manager, Los Angeles Region, League of CA Cities
- Sue Herbers, Retired City Clerk, Torrance
- Ed Honowitz, Education Policy Advisor, Senator Carol Liu, 25th Senate District
- James Keene, City Manager, Palo Alto
- Maria Elena Kennedy, Co-Chair Disadvantaged Communities Caucus, California Water Plan Update Inland Empire
- Jeff Kiernan, Regional Public Affairs Manager, Los Angeles Region, League of CA Cities
- Malka Kopell, Co-Founder, Civity Initiative
- Edward (Ted) Lascher, Jr., Associate Dean, College of Social Sciences & Interdisciplinary Studies, CSU Sacramento
- Ron Loveridge, Director, Center for Sustainable Suburban Development, University of California, Riverside
- Victor Manolo, Council Member, Artesia
- Pat Martel, City Manager, Daly City
- Shelly Masur, Board Member, Redwood City School Board
- Noelle Mattock, Director, El Dorado Hills Community Services District
- Bev Perry, former Mayor, Brea
- Pete Peterson, Executive Director, Davenport Institute for Public Engagement and Civic Leadership
- Lee Price, Master City Clerk, San Luis Obispo
- Stephen Qualls, Regional Public Affairs Manager, Central Valley Region, League of CA Cities
- Peter Rumble, MPA, Chief Executive Officer, California Clean Power
- Tim Snellings, Director, County of Butte Department of Development Services
- Yvonne Spence, CRM, CMC, City Clerk, Fresno
- Christine Tien, MPP, JD, Program Manager, The California Endowment

## Focus Groups

Three focus groups were held, in which a total of 25 individuals of various occupational backgrounds and expertise were engaged. The focus groups conducted were: counties, cities (Southern CA, specifically the Southgate area) and public engagement consultants. A fourth focus group was planned with the Gold County Chapter of the CA Special Districts Association but it was cancelled due to the Butte fire.

The focus groups proved to be invaluable to the evaluation project, especially in providing both a local government perspective and a consultant perspective. When observed as a whole, the focus groups provided three main insights into the realm of public engagement, and provided the feedback necessary for the Public Engagement Program to determine its path in the future:

### *The Intersection of Public Engagement Awareness and Practicality*

There was a consensus among all three focus groups that awareness of public engagement in local government has seen a steady rise in the last two decades; however, both city and county governments continue to face numerous obstacles in implementing public engagement efforts. It was noted that government officials often carry preconceived notions concerning the outcomes of public engagement endeavors, and many (especially noted by the cities focus group) fail to pay much consideration to the thoughts and concerns of community based organizations. The counties focus group also noted that local governments are often inconsistent in their public engagement efforts, and tend to decide whether or not they wish to reach out to the public based on the issue at hand.

This may be because—despite exhibiting enthusiasm for participation in governmental decisions—the public is often uninformed about policy topics and the ways in which local government operates, or is too distrusting of government officials. In the counties and cities focus groups, it was discussed how local governments might better engage community members in ways that are both effective and convenient for the public.

The public engagement consultants focus group noted that while the field of public engagement has recently become more established and sophisticated, it continues to lack a vital clarity—local governments are often unsure of what they wish to accomplish through the public engagement framework. A consensus was reached that this is the most pressing setback facing local government public engagement.

### *The Role of Social Media and Technology in Public Engagement*

A major point of discussion in all three focus groups was the potential of social media in the public engagement process. Both the cities and the counties focus groups agreed that social media has the potential to be a positive tool for outreach by local governments; however, training is needed to ensure that staffers are communicating engagingly and effectively with the public. The counties focus group also brought up the interesting point that in practice, technology is not the panacea that many professionals believe it to be or hoped it would be. Specifically, the counties focus group was concerned that social media efforts only reach community members who are already involved in local government, and fail to reach those who have never been involved, and/or do not have the resources necessary for electronic engagement.

In addition, there was a notable divide in the public engagement consultants focus group concerning the usefulness of technology as a whole in public engagement at the local level. Specifically, it was noted that the number of tech-based options available to local governments and facilitation consultants has the potential to be overwhelming and confusing. Currently, there is no one-stop, trusted source that can help clients understand the pros and cons of the tech products that are constantly entering the market. It should be noted that the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation attempts to do this; however, local government staffers are often not connected to the NCDD.

In this way, the complexities of incorporating technology into local government public engagement projects were highlighted.

#### *Increased Awareness of ILG's Public Engagement Program*

While the scope of the ILG Public Engagement Program is vast and diverse, the counties and cities focus groups revealed that there are still communities throughout California that are not aware of the services and resources provided by the Program. This was found to be truer for the counties focus group, whose participants were not familiar with ILG but were eager to take advantage of the knowledge provided by the Program. It was noted that increased engagement with California's counties is an exciting opportunity for the Program to further spread its wealth of knowledge. Both the cities and counties focus groups identified in-person trainings (on topics such as social media, effective communication and strategies for resident engagement on nuanced/ technical/ controversial topics) as the best way for ILG to help local governments.

The public engagement consultant focus group suggested that the Program make efforts to diversify its methods of communication with local governments; specifically, they suggested complementing lengthy narrative stories with short videos, and encouraged the continued use of ILG's successful tip sheets. It was also noted that the Program might begin to focus on establishing a set framework for local governments to use while making public decisions, rather than focusing on frequently publishing new materials.

All three focus groups agreed that the Public Engagement Program's existing materials are already very helpful for local governments, and that enhanced distribution should be a main focus of the Program.

## **Inventory of Program Efforts**

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ILG staff created an inventory documenting all of the work the PE Program has done since its inception in 2005. The primary research and inventory compilation was conducted by Madeline Henry. In order to create this inventory we began by looking at past grant reports. These reports created an outline for the inventory as they listed most conference sessions, case studies, guides and other publications. Next, we reviewed hardcopy files, our computer filing system and our website for any missing documents. Finally, we checked in with past program staff to have them review the inventory and fill in any gaps.

*Impact:* We found that the program has created:

- 132 Case Studies



- 71 Articles for Western City magazine
- 43 Newsletters
- 39 Tip Sheets
- 39 Long Format Guides
- 3 Surveys or Evaluations
- 1 Article for the California Special District magazine (ILG parent organization as of January 2015)
- 1 Article for the County Voice

The major ‘ah-ha’ of the inventory was seeing not only the volume of publications and in-field activities, but also the diversity in the work that has been executed over the last ten years. Trends emerged around Program pursuits that inform our future efforts. A majority of publications were on public engagement basics, followed by: increasing outreach, budgeting, immigration, planning, housing and sustainability. To view the inventory see the attachment entitled “Public Engagement Inventory.”

A large part of the Program’s impact has come from its conference sessions. Since 2005, the PE Program has led or been a part of 203 conference sessions and workshops. Although data for the number of people participating in these conference sessions was not collected in the early years of the Program, over the last five years we have developed a better picture of the numbers of individuals we are reaching.

## What We Learned

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### Impact Analysis

Consultants Marois and James worked with the PE Program to design an impact evaluation that built on process and outcome data to examine longer term, broad changes. The assessment effort, funded by The James Irvine Foundation, was the most in-depth evaluation undertaken of the PE Program as well as of any aspect of ILG’s work. It marks the setting of a baseline against which ILG and the PE Program can reflect on progress and impact going forward. The effort sought to understand the role of ILG in changing how local officials use public involvement practices to help inform residents and shape policy decisions. The effort was also about accountability: How was The James Irvine Foundation’s investment used and what difference did it make?

In addition to the PE Program’s Logic Model, three frameworks informed Marois and James’ approach to the evaluation of the PE Program’s impact: 1) the Prevention Institute’s Spectrum of Prevention, 2) Results Based Accountability, and 3) Collective Impact. These conceptual models help to explain the complex process by which societal change occurs. Each considers varying levels of change and the multiple sectors that must coordinate efforts to achieve results. Overall, the common thread is that no one intervention or organization is able to single-handedly shift norms or create population-level change.

A combination of these frameworks resulted in five questions to guide the overall evaluation design and process:

- 1) What was produced, why, and what was the outcome?

- 2) What changes occurred in local government and public engagement?
- 3) What new relationships were established?
- 4) How were relationships strengthened?
- 5) What are the lessons learned from ILG's PE Program work?

*Impact:* Marois and James reported that ILG's PE Program demonstrated outcomes across all levels of change through the entire Spectrum of Impact. Some of the specific activities, services and products that contributed to shifts in public engagement practices among local government in California include:

- Leveraged funding to expand public engagement in several issue areas, most notably immigrant integration/welcoming, youth engagement and technology
- Generated 335 educational publications and 203 training opportunities
- Provided on-the-ground consultation services to local government, resulting in demonstration projects that introduce new practices, produce outcomes, shift norms and provide examples others can learn from and replicate
- Established new professional networks devoted to enhancing public engagement in local government in California
- Pursued outreach and communication strategies through networks with the potential to reach more than 70,000 people
- Offered an equipment loan program to increase access to public engagement technology that would otherwise be unavailable due to expense. The equipment allows greater participation among non and limited-English speaking community members

#### ***Publications, Training Workshops and Conferences***

Education and training is a central feature of the PE Program. Consequently, great emphasis is placed on the production and distribution of publications, along with participation in workshops and conferences.

Topics vary based on emerging interests and needs of local government and communities, determined through regular communication with parent organizations, advisors, funders and other partners. The most common publication types are case studies and *Western City Magazine* articles.

#### ***Public Engagement Equipment Loan Programs***

The PE Program equipment loan program seeks to support increased community involvement in local governance by providing technologies to agencies that lack access. This program appears especially useful for rural areas in the California's Central Valley. Translation equipment in particular allows limited and non-English speaking residents greater ability to participate. Examples are seen in Objective 5.

Key pad polling devices allow meeting participants to anonymously register their preferences in real time. The Program goal in the past has been to fulfill 10 requests per year for the loan of these devices. While this activity has been fulfilled, the consultants concluded (and PE Program staff agree) that ILG should revamp the program to either increase the efficiency and cost effectiveness of distribution, or to re-evaluate its overall usefulness. Although Increased marketing could boost useage, feedback from the field has indicated that learning to use the software is sometimes a stretch for staff. A greater need

than learning to use the software is question construction. The ‘art’ of question construction for polling questions limited to a “1-10” response is more nuanced than individuals realize. This became more apparent to PE Program staff through the July 7, 2015 co-sponsored book event with author David Campt, *Let No Voice Be Unheard: How to Read the Room with a Simple Technology*. However, there are new cell phone applications that are growing in popularity (and PE Program staff are experimenting with) that will likely, in some settings, replace more expensive key pad polling devices.

Examples of ILG’s PE Program impacts are mapped to the Spectrum of Impact, beginning with the lowest level (Strengthening Individual Knowledge & Skills) and ending with the highest and most sustainable level (Influencing Policy & Legislation) per the Marois/ James Report:

***Strengthening Individual Knowledge & Skills: Enhancing an individual’s capability for public engagement.*** The ILG PE Program provided an array of training, conferences, workshops, webinars and consultations to build the skills of local officials, community members and practitioners on a variety of public engagement topics. More than 4609 participants attended a total of 203 sessions. In the 2015 ILG Public Engagement survey, 83 percent of respondents who took part in PE Program learning opportunities reported an increase in public engagement knowledge and/or capacity (96/115).

***Promoting Community Education: Reaching groups of people with information and resources.*** The PE Program produced 335 publications on a variety of topics to assist local governments in learning and using public engagement techniques; in addition, website visitors downloaded more than 7079 public engagement documents from September 2009 – October 2015. The program has assisted local governments in using new outreach methods to inform and engage constituents traditionally not involved in public decision making. For example, one technical assistance project in the City of Turlock engaged Assyrian, Portuguese and faith communities in redistricting to conform to requirements of California’s Voter Rights Act. Through more than 40 networks of its Public Engagement Champions, ILG reaches an estimated 66,000 email recipients with content related to public engagement. Social media channels reach more than 7,500 additional recipients.

***Educating Providers: Informing practitioners who will transmit skills and knowledge to others.*** The PE Program has produced a series of linked publications, guides and technical resources that were combined with on-the-ground consultative approaches. As a result, participants become “champions” of public engagement practices and are often tapped to share their experiences and lessons learned. This is a deliberate strategy to ensure local government officials educate their peers on successful public engagement methods and efforts. The PE Program has showcased successful examples through publications of case stories, conferences and peer networks to spur statewide and national replication. For example: the PE Program partnered with Welcoming America, City of Oakley and City of Redwood City to launch the first two welcoming initiatives in California. Then, these were presented at the League’s 2012 City Managers Annual Meeting. The Immigration Policy Center published *“Immigrant Entrepreneurs, Innovation and Welcoming Initiatives in the Golden State,”* which featured “You Me We Oakley” and “Redwood City Together.”<sup>i</sup> ILG’s Public Engagement staff helped to develop the *“Receiving Communities”* toolkit designed for practitioners across the nation. Redwood City is included.<sup>ii</sup>

**Fostering Coalitions & Networks: Bringing people together for broader goals and greater impact.** The PE Program has created new Public Engagement networks including: a 33-member Panel of Advisors, 54 Champions, 220 identified public engagement consultants, a 3,475-person database to support education and networking, and cofounded the California Consortium on Public Engagement.

**Changing Organizational Practices: Adopting regulations and shaping norms.** The PE Program has leveraged resources to contribute to a “cultural shift” toward more inclusive public engagement practices, enhanced participation of non and limited-English speaking community members in local decision making, encouraged inclusiveness in decision making and experimentation with new technology, and conducted periodic surveys to document changes in public engagement practices, knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs.

**Influencing Policy & Legislation: Public engagement informs changes in laws and policies.** The PE Program has provided consultation services to support effective public engagement practices and implementation, resulting in highly successful outcomes for local government jurisdictions. For example: the City of Turlock’s California Voting Rights Act public engagement effort led to the highest statewide district elections ballot passage at 70 percent. ILG’s \$50,000 in-kind investment saved the city millions in potential lawsuit costs. The PE Program work with the Contra Costa Transportation Authority achieved more public participation and received more comments to inform transportation infrastructure decisions than all other public engagement efforts in the previous 25 years combined.

These findings from the Impact Analysis inform the PE Program’s future efforts.

## Validity of Logic Model

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One goal of the project was to revise ILG’s program logic model, as appropriate, for enhanced strategic impact given the findings of the evaluation. PE staff concurred with the evaluation consultants finding that the outcomes of the assessment validate the PE Program’s current Logic Model, meaning it does not need to be revised. The consultants confirmed that the logic model included the appropriate range of activities needed to support meaningful public engagement in local governance decisions.

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<sup>i</sup> *Immigrant Entrepreneurs, Innovation and Welcoming Initiatives in the Golden State.* (July 2013). Immigration Policy Center. Retrieved December 14, 2015 from:

[http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/docs/california\\_entrepreneurship\\_2.pdf](http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/docs/california_entrepreneurship_2.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> Downs-Karkos, S. *Receiving Communities Toolkit: A Guide for Engaging Mainstream America in Immigrant Integration.* (Oct 2011). Retrieved December 14, 2015 from:

[http://www.welcomingamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Receiving-Communities-Toolkit\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.welcomingamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Receiving-Communities-Toolkit_FINAL.pdf)

**Attachments:**

**Public Engagement Inventory:**

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1-F3lmzh2m-Tet6IDFU8RD3OJbw3K7vcCue2zbp8b33A/edit?usp=sharing>

**ILG Public Engagement Logic Model**

