

Notes on the “Working with Existing Neighborhood Councils and Committees” Approach

A number of cities and counties have ongoing working relationships with neighborhood councils or committees through which to engage residents in community building and solicit community input on a range of policy and community development matters. Such neighborhood councils can help provide early community input into budget preparations as well as review and offer feedback on specific proposed budgets. Their members are typically highly motivated individuals with an interest in participation, and they can serve as an important part of the broad cross-section of the community that a county or city may wish to engage.

Because of their work focus and relative permanence they can also bring a useful knowledge of local agency services and community needs. They may also be counted on to be a part of the budgeting process on an annual basis.

Keep in Mind

Local agencies must provide these councils and committees with information about the budget and clear roles and responsibilities in the budget process. Agencies must also show how the input received will be considered by policymakers. In some cases, appropriate organizational or process support may be provided to neighborhood groups to ensure their effective participation.

Committees and councils with resident membership that includes harder to reach or typically less involved populations will be especially important partners – as will those that can serve as conduits to neighborhood residents beyond a small leadership group.

Those neighborhood groups that claim to speak for the neighborhood but whose members do not reflect resident diversity may need to be encouraged to seek greater diversity. Otherwise, the local agency may need to pursue more inclusive and representative engagement.

As with many of the public engagement approaches described above, working through existing neighborhood council and committees will often be most effective as one component of a larger public engagement strategy.

Key Elements

Neighborhood committees and councils can be integrated into a public engagement process on the budget in a number of ways. For those neighborhood groups that already have budgeting experience and expectations of being involved, shared learning (by the neighborhood council or committee and the local agency) based on past budget engagement experience is important and should lead to improvements in the process. Regularly updated understandings (or formal protocols) outlining how the local agency will engage the neighborhood group in the next budget cycle should also be pursued.

Any of the specific engagement approaches described earlier in this guide could be used in conjunction with neighborhood councils and commissions. However given the community-wide perspective that these neighborhood entities may have, it will often be useful to engage them relatively early in the budgeting process through budget workshops or forums. These approaches will more likely solicit members’ ideas and build broader community trust and support for the final budget plan.

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The Institute welcomes feedback on this resource:

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