Additional Resources
Providing Language Access
TIPS FOR LOCAL OFFICIALS

Did you know...

6.9 Million Californians have Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

68% are Spanish speakers followed by Chinese, Vietnamese, Tagalog and Korean.

The California Civil Rights Act prohibits discrimination by agencies that receive state funds and requires them to provide equal access to benefits.

The Bilingual Services Act requires local agencies to provide language access services to limited English-proficient speakers. Providing language access in some circumstances may be the only way to facilitate public participation in California’s communities.

Tips for Providing Language Access Services

1. Connect language access efforts to the larger mission and goals of the local agency.

2. Develop policies that clarify your local agency’s responsibilities for providing bilingual services and ensure that local officials understand these policies, responsibilities and existing language access services and resources.

3. Partner with community-based organizations and ethnic media to better identify language access priorities, ensure accurate and culturally appropriate interpretation and translation and more fully assess the effectiveness of language access plans.

4. Translate print and online materials explaining services into languages spoken by a substantial number of LEP residents. Minimize the use of bureaucratic or legal jargon when creating all new documents.

5. Create web pages that are easy to navigate and use. Web pages may ease fears of immigrant residents who may not feel comfortable seeking services in person.

6. Encourage local departments to consider using California Multiple Award Schedules (CMAS) contracts to obtain bilingual services whenever cost-effective.

7. Use bilingual employees effectively and appropriately. Avoid assumptions about competence and willingness of bilingual staff to provide language services.

Resources to learn more:


Ten Ideas to Encourage Immigrant Engagement | www.ca-ilg.org/ten-ideas-immigrant-engagement

Increasing Outreach | www.ca-ilg.org/increasing-outreach
The Institute for Local Government (ILG) has developed a new framework any local government can use to plan and execute public engagement efforts. The “TIERS” 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 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 Framework and its companion program, the TIERS Learning Lab, provide a step by step approach to public engagement.

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

- Better identification of the public’s values, ideas and recommendations
- More informed residents
- Improved local agency decision making and actions, with better impacts and outcomes
- More community buy-in and support, with less contentiousness
- More civil 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 hrs to 6 weeks)
  - **Template Provided**
- Agency Assessment
  - Davenport Institute's "How are WE Doing?" assessment tool

**Step 2: Consider Public Engagement Approach**
- Draft Public Engagement Approach for Specific Effort
  - **Template Provided**
- Draft Public Engagement Approach for Agency Wide Application
  - Review agency’s public engagement policies and practices, including current staffing
  - Conduct an analysis of the public engagement functions and needs across the 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: Draft 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
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

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. challenging people; communications skills; small group facilitation)
- Are there community leaders who the agency should build stronger ties with?

Step 3: What Barriers Did You Overcome?
- What internal organizational barriers did you overcome?
- What other political barriers did you overcome?

Step 1: Internal Organizational
- Consider beneficial organizational shifts
  - For example: public engagement assigned within job description(s); commitment to train electeds 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, Davenport Institute 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
  - Commitment 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
TIERS Learning Lab

In the TIERS Learning Lab local government elected officials and staff will:

- Learn to utilize a step-by-step framework to successfully plan and implement public engagement – whether it’s a one-time single event or an ongoing, holistic approach.
- Discuss strategies to overcome a wide variety of barriers and challenges often seen in public engagement work.
- Work through a relevant, local public engagement example to better understand resource related choices (e.g., staffing, money, time).
- Connect with others from cities, counties and special districts in the region to provide mutual support for successful public engagement efforts.

Benefit from customized technical assistance and coaching before, during and after the Learning Lab.

To learn more about the TIERS Learning Lab and other training opportunities in your region or to learn how ILG can come to you, please contact Madeline Henry at mhenry@ca-ilg.org.

About the Institute for Local Government

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To access the Institute’s resources on public engagement, visit www.ca-ilg.org/engagement

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This work is supported by a generous grant from The James Irvine Foundation.
Beyond the Usuals
Ideas to Encourage Broader Public Engagement in Community Decision Making

Given the challenges facing cities and counties in California, local officials are increasingly asking residents to participate in public engagement efforts whose outcomes will help shape the future of their communities. These discussions are about land use, budgeting, affordable housing, climate change, transportation, public safety and many other local and regional issues.

However even with the best of intentions to encourage broad participation, local officials often find that only a relatively small number of community members actually take part in public conversations and forums.

A failure to involve a cross-section of residents limits the effectiveness of these public engagement efforts and negatively impacts the breadth and quality of ideas contributed. It can also reduce community support for the final decisions.

Most California communities have diverse populations and some have experienced rapid demographic changes. Residents vary by age, gender, ethnicity, immigrant status and income level. Some own homes and some rent. Community members may be long-time residents or new arrivals. People read and speak English with different degrees of proficiency. Some have disabilities. Individual residents, as well as whole communities, may have more or less experience, confidence, or capacity to participate.

Based on the ideas of many individuals and organizations, and on the experiences of communities throughout California, here are a number of ideas for achieving broader representation in local public engagement efforts.
DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS

Less engaged communities are often critical of the public engagement process. Developing personal relationships with the community can lead to a more inclusive process and community buy-in.

BUILD COMMUNITY CAPACITY TO PARTICIPATE

Community members have varying degrees of familiarity with local government processes and functions. Providing educational materials or process at the beginning of the public engagement process will allow more meaningful participation from the broad community.

FIT YOUR PROCESS TO THE PARTICIPANTS

Once you determine the purpose of a public engagement process, think about the range of participants you hope to involve before selecting your approach or process(es) for that involvement. This will help you create opportunities for participation that will be more appropriate and welcoming for participants and reach the diversity community.

GET HELP

Identify and consult community-based and intermediary organizations, including neighborhood and grassroots leadership groups, local clergy, faith-based organizations, community and ethnic media, and others that can as provide two-way conduits for communication between local officials and community residents on specific issues and polices.

COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY AND RESPECTFULLY

Stay current with your communities changing demographics, and develop culturally and linguistically appropriate communications material and strategies. Recognize the importance of communicating with residents in their first language to ensure their maximum understanding of issues. As appropriate, promote public engagement through ethnic media and other intermediary organizations that already serve and work with the communities you wish to reach. Plan ahead for translation services. Transportation assistance and childcare (perhaps through respected intermediary organizations) can often be helpful.

BE FLEXIBLE

Hold public meetings or other public engagement processes in community settings that are known and accessible to the communities you wish to reach. Explore what engagement tools and processes will best meet the needs and conditions of specific populations.

HAVE SPECIFIC GOALS

Take the time to create targeted goals for harder to reach communities. In general, encourage attention and learning about inclusive engagement throughout your agency, and include public information officers in these discussions. Individual departments can develop their own outreach plans to reach specific less-engaged communities or populations.
**STAY IN TOUCH**

As appropriate, keep current lists of organizations and groups concerned about given issues and keep them informed of opportunities to participate.

**SAY THANK YOU & FOLLOW-UP**

Express your appreciation for those who do become involved. Let participants know how their input was considered and impacted decisions.

**KEEP LEARNING**

Follow up after specific engagement efforts to determine what worked and what could be improved.

**BUILD IT IN**

Explore the integration of diverse community voices as a part of your overall strategy to inform and support the goals and programs of local government.

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Partnering with Community-Based Organizations for More Broad-Based Public Engagement

This publication is for local government officials interested in collaborating with local community-based organizations to enhance the breadth and depth of participation by community residents in local decision-making. Interviews with both local officials and community leaders throughout California were used to generate guidance for those who are getting started or want to enhance their relationships with more of their community.

Why Partner?

Many local officials report that the residents they see participating in their public meetings are a narrow slice of the whole community. To address this challenge, many local agencies use a strategy of nurturing relationships with community-based organizations (CBO) to better reach and engage a broader cross section of residents. The important benefits they cite from these partnerships include the ability to:

- Extend the agency’s education and outreach capacities so more residents are aware and informed
- Balance the most involved advocates with perspectives representing more of the community
- Reduce misperceptions and mistrust, and reduce contentiousness
- Identify broader community-based resources and recommendations
- Develop communication channels for keeping people informed over time
- Enhance the cultural competency of engagement plans, and increase the ability to translate issues into relevant questions/framing and accessible language
- Reach people emotionally as well as physically

Local government agencies using this approach have learned that being very intentional about the purposes and parameters of their partnerships can make a dramatic difference in their effectiveness.

Types of Community-Based Organizations

All jurisdictions have non-profit organizations committed to improving the quality of life in their community. Examples include parent-teacher organizations, congregations, sports leagues, adult education programs

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1 76 percent of city and county officials say that public meetings are dominated by people with narrow agendas. Testing the Waters, May 2013 report with findings from 900 California local officials, available at: www.ca-ilg.org/research-public-engagement-local-government-decision-making. The link has a companion report of research conducted among 500 leaders of civic organizations.
and service clubs such as Rotary or Kiwanis. These kinds of organizations can complement those that may already participate actively in public meetings, such as the chamber of commerce and neighborhood associations.

Partnerships are often sought as a way to elicit unheard perspectives on how an issue or problem is experienced, which can enhance specific policy directions or recommendations. Some agencies have a practice of sharing lists and information about community-based organizations across departments as a way to leverage past investments in these relationships. Instead of developing a new outreach effort and list for each new issue and decision process, they have a ready cross section of the greater community already oriented to some aspect of local decision making. It is also helpful to investigate and acknowledge existing collaborations and networks between organizations to understand how information flows in the community.

### Clarifying Purpose and Alignment

The desired demographic and geographic audiences are often the starting point for deciding which community organization(s) will be the most effective partners.

It is also important to identify the purpose and what type of public education and public input is desired. Many officials find this continuum from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) a useful way to summarize different types of engagement:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Inform</th>
<th>Consult</th>
<th>Involve</th>
<th>Collaborate</th>
<th>Empower</th>
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The best way to determine the right fit is by having an exploratory discussion to assess how the group’s focus matches the audiences, topics and activities the local public agency is contemplating for engagement. If after meeting with a community organization, it turns out that there is not an immediate fit for a partnership, valuable information about that part of the community’s perspective will still have been gained. At times, it may be important for a period of relationship building, both organizational and personal, to take place before a new partnership is launched. The local agency may financially support some of the staff work or other costs involved in the CBO’s partnership activities. If a grant is sought to help pay for the outreach and engagement efforts, the CBO should be involved in the planning and budgeting for its activities.

### Types of Partnerships

Planning departments, health and human service departments, metropolitan planning organizations, public information officers and many other local agency offices are employing CBO partnerships. Frequently, local agency staff have limited time to be present in multiple communities.
often enough to build the kind of rapport that invites engagement, so they connect and partner with a range of CBOs in various ways. Common examples of CBO partner tasks include:

- Expand awareness of upcoming public engagement processes
- Co-host public input sessions in locations more familiar to community members
- Help agency staff understand the community’s current level of understanding about an issue so materials can provide helpful background context
- Help adapt information about the issue into language and a format that make sense to nontechnical experts and people with varying levels of education
- Translate information and provide bilingual facilitation if appropriate
- Recruit attendees and provide any needed support such as transportation and child care
- Help with reporting back to the community about how their input was used in the final decision and ways that they can stay involved and informed

Depending on the extent of the work involved, many agencies provide some kind of compensation to the community organization for their efforts. Sometimes a local community foundation or other funder may help underwrite such costs.

**Creating the Right Conditions**

When forming a working partnership, as with developing any relationship, no single “formula” exists for developing effective plans, communications and trust. Instead, both local officials and community leaders shared that the following conditions were an important starting point:

- There is adequate advance dialogue between the agency and the CBO to determine the *mutual* interests of the partnership. The desired community engagement needs to be positioned so that it aligns with the community organization’s as well the local agency’s priorities.
- The local government agency’s decision-makers are on board and committed to the intended outcome of the partnership. They are making an authentic request for community input that will be seriously considered in the decision-making process.
- The partnership is based on mutual respect for what each party brings. For example, the CBO can provide insight into which attitudinal barriers different sectors of the community may have about interacting with local government. If there is a history of mistrust, it helps to bring it out in the open.
- The local agency and CBO(s) have clearly defined roles and expectations for each other.
- The agency is prepared to support the information and communication needs of the broader cross section of the public who tend to know far less than more experienced advocates and local government enthusiasts.

“Are you thinking about these community groups as constituents to be managed or placated — or as genuine partners collaborating with you on a shared goal of expanding participation?” — City official

Local officials’ experience suggests that the most effective partnerships were used for the whole decision-making cycle: the front-end public introduction of the issue, the community input and dialogue, and the reporting out of how public input was used in the final decision. Another helpful practice when entering into the relationship with the CBO is to set up periodic checkpoints to review milestones and correct
course on the outreach as needed. Include an explicit debrief of what worked well and what can be improved for the next time. In summary, local officials and CBO leaders should honestly share their respective goals and needs and then work out a mutually accepted plan for tasks and task completion, for meetings and other communications, for CBO partner compensation (where appropriate), for how decisions will be made in relationship to shared work, and whether and how they plan to assess the work done once completed.

“I get a call asking: ‘Can you get 50 parents to the meeting?’
First I want to talk about what people in the community care about.”
— Leader of a large nonprofit organization

Navigating Around Common Pitfalls

Partnerships tend to work well if they are based on mutual goals, clear communication and trusting relationships. But many times the partnership between a local agency and community-based organizations hits trouble spots. Here are some of the most commonly reported pitfalls and helpful practices to enhance the likelihood of success.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Pitfalls</th>
<th>Helpful Practices</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treating the CBO as a “supplier” for one-way communication to the community, especially to enlist support for an existing recommendation.</td>
<td>Develop processes for two-way communications about mutually defined concerns — without assuming what the final policy recommendation will be.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unrealistic expectations for the CBO partner — not enough time or resources allocated for robust engagement.</td>
<td>Start early, establish shared understanding about what is feasible, and consider using a network of multiple CBOs.</td>
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<td>Selecting organizations that already have a fixed point of view that limits discovery of common ground.</td>
<td>Look beyond the most visible groups engaged in public dialogue, and find those interested in general quality of life in the community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The recruitment worked but the meeting process and/or information did not match the audience.</td>
<td>Partner with the CBOs to develop materials and questions that make sense to the broader community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>There is a perception that decision-makers do not treat the new community voices brought in through the partnership with equal respect.</td>
<td>Involve decision-makers in the goals for the community engagement and what kinds of input they will be receiving and can listen for.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partnership agreement is too vague. It’s unclear who has responsibility for which part of the process.</td>
<td>Create an explicit set of responsibilities for the CBO and the local public agency, and revisit as needed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The community feels “used” spending time providing input with no information about outcome.</td>
<td>Explain decisions and next steps. Continue to invest in opportunities for two-way communication.</td>
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Busy local officials are often encouraged to focus their activities on concrete short-term deliverables with high likelihood for success. Because it takes time to nurture and sustain partnerships with community organizations, some tend to make this practice a lower priority. Others may have had past experiences where some aspects of the partnership worked well but other aspects did not, and they are reluctant to re-engage in something that was not an unqualified success. However, elected local officials and staff may choose to recognize the longer-term value of such partnerships and the more informed, inclusive decision-making — and public trust — that can result from these efforts. They can embrace a learning-oriented mindset and work with community partners to reflect on and improve public engagement processes.

Resources to Learn More

- **Beyond the Usuals** - [www.ca-ilg.org/BeyondUsuals](http://www.ca-ilg.org/BeyondUsuals)
- **Planning Public Engagement: Key Questions for Local Officials** - [www.ca-ilg.org/PublicEngagementKeyQuestions](http://www.ca-ilg.org/PublicEngagementKeyQuestions)

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Many public officials have a wide variety of relationships in their communities, often related to specific projects and initiatives. Examples include interactions with schools, groups serving specific populations, business associations, faith-based organizations and more. Yet these groups and networks may not come to mind when an agency is planning and announcing public meetings.

Use the following list to identify different partners, network contacts and “key connectors” in your agency’s jurisdiction. The next time the agency wants to reach out beyond the small slice of the public that most frequently attends public meetings, consider reaching out to the community through some of the types of organizations listed here. Add these contacts to the agency’s outreach list, so this wider range of contacts is ready whenever needed.

Groups Close to Local Government Decision-Making and Operations

- Board and commission members in the jurisdiction
- Past and present members of community task forces and working groups
- Public agency-sponsored citizen academies and resident leadership programs
- Local multi-sector leadership groups and business roundtables
- Advocates and service providers whose work relates to the issue under review
Networks Where Community Members Affiliate by Interest

- Parent-teacher associations/organizations, school support organizations
- Youth: groups not tied to schools (Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs, youth sports leagues, scouts, YMCA, youth centers, etc.); parent groups/mother’s clubs
- Business: chambers of commerce, ethnic chambers; small business associations and incubators
- Labor associations
- Community-oriented and ethnic media
- Internet-based groups and blogs
- Neighborhood organizations and homeowners’ associations
- Civic membership groups: Rotary, Elks, Kiwanis, etc.
- Friends of the Library
- Good government groups, League of Women Voters
- Adult education: community colleges, adult schools, English as a second language programs
- Safety: Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), Neighborhood Watch
- Community health and wellness groups
- Sports leagues
- Seniors’ groups
- Early childhood groups: First 5 Commission, child care councils
- Social equity/social justice
- Environmental groups and outdoor recreation
- Arts groups: music, visual, dance, theater, ethnic culture

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