

PEPPERDINE | SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY

**DAVENPORT INSTITUTE**  
— FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND CIVIC LEADERSHIP —

ELGL Innovation Cohort  
August 27, 2019

# What's So Hard About Public Engagement?

# Objectives

by the end of this conversation, you will be able to:

- Develop shared definitions for “public engagement” in your agency
- Help your agency evaluate readiness to engage
- Begin to identify obstacles to engagement and develop strategies for overcoming them

# Why Public Engagement? And Why NOW?!



**FAKE**  
**NEWS**  
**ALERT!**

## AND – Localization of National Issues

“Residents still trust local government more than other levels of government . . . but we are often the closest punching bag”

~Mike Kasperzak, former mayor, Mountainview

# AND - Complexity of issues

What is the biggest issue facing your community?

[Pollev.com/ashleylabosi985](https://Pollev.com/ashleylabosi985)

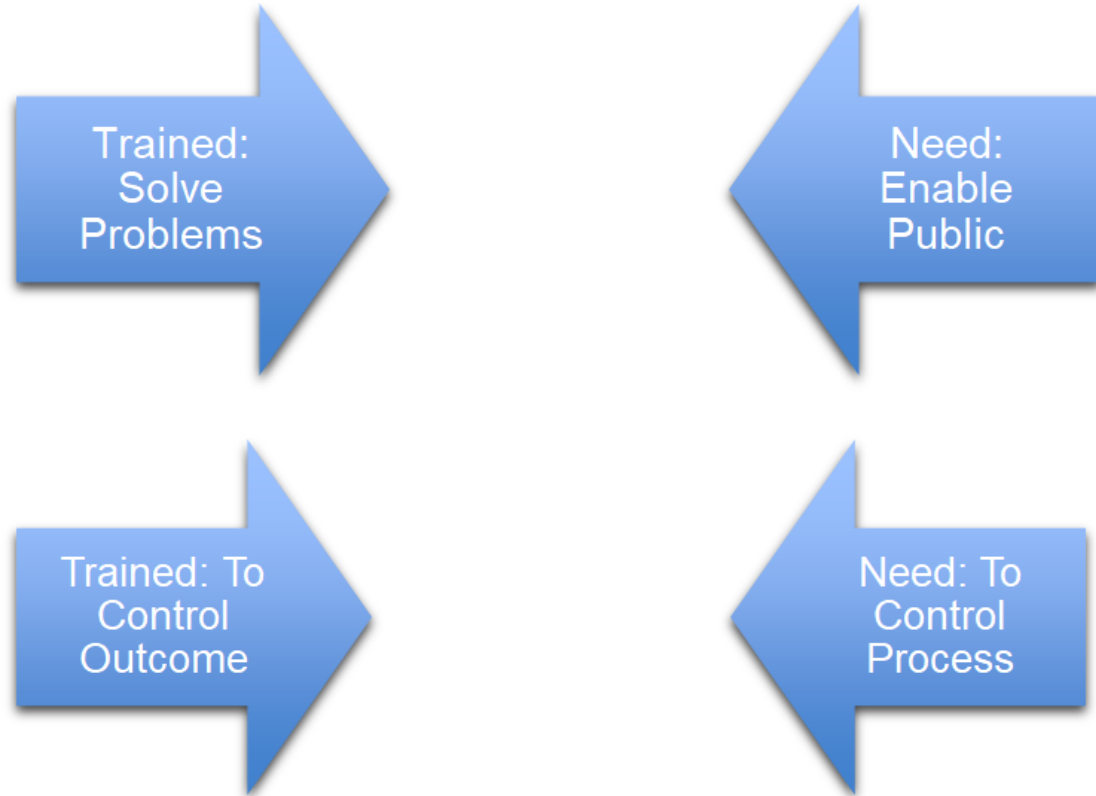
Public  
Engagement is  
Important

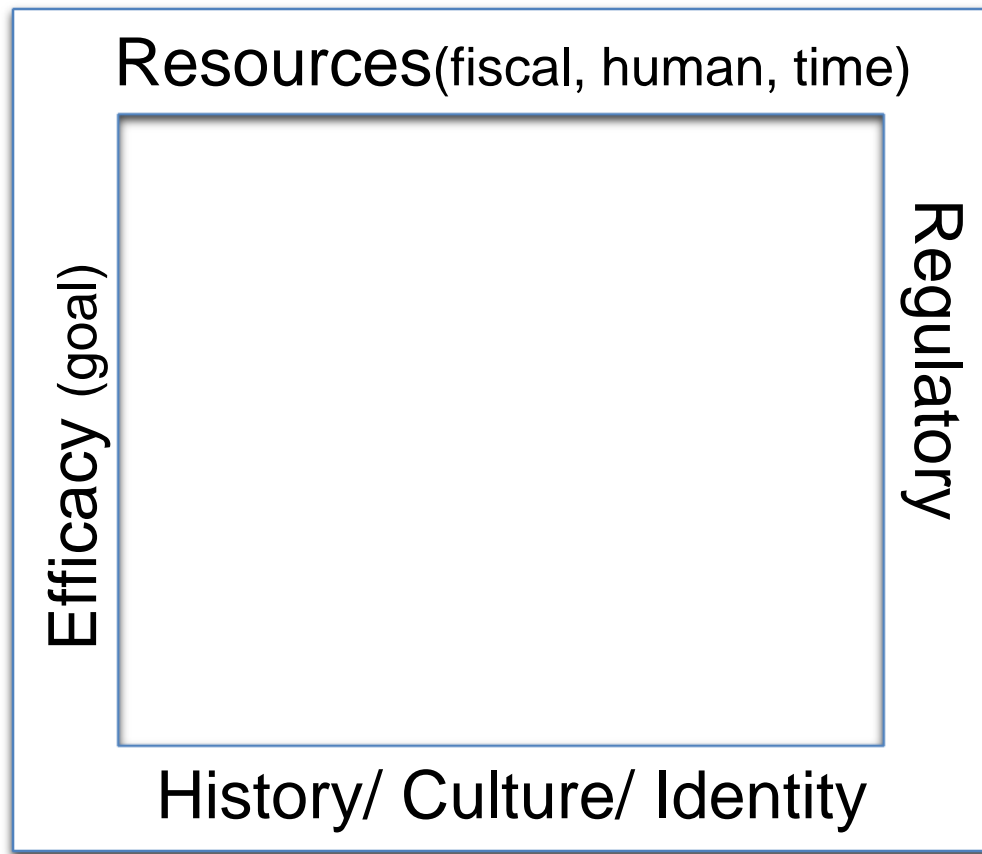
Public  
Engagement is  
Hard

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We need a new  
“availability  
heuristic” for  
public  
engagement

Gap between “what we know”  
and “what we need”





# The Policy Box



# Public Engagement is a Spectrum of Processes

When someone says “We should engage the public” ask “For which purpose?”



# Matching Process to Purpose

Moving down the spectrum there are changes in:

- Role of government (v. residents)
- Necessary Timeline
- Appropriate process
- Appropriate Venue
- Facilitation
- Desired Conclusion

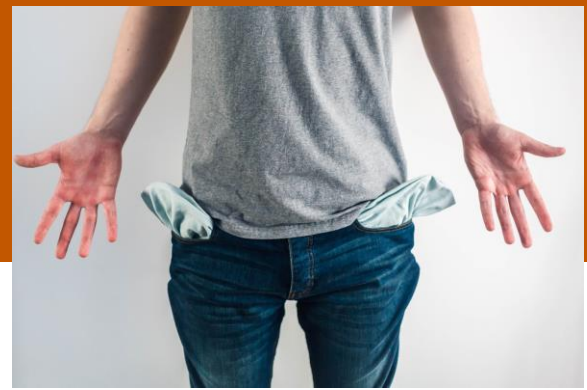
# Essences of Good Engagement:

- Participants talk to *each other*
- Staff or electeds pose the right questions
- Staff & electeds *listen & learn*
- Feedback is incorporated into policy decisions
- Staff or electeds report back *how* input was used

# Are you ready to engage?

- Do you know *why* you are engaging?
- Are the decision makers on board?
- Is there sufficient time?
- Who is taking the lead?
- Who are your community partners?
- Context (don't step on landmines)?
- Do you have necessary resources?
- Are you willing to take a risk? How do you know if it pays off?

# Common Obstacle 1: Lack of budget/ resources



- Do you REALLY not have resources?
- Who are your community partners?
- Funding/ grant opportunities
- Homemade is A-okay (Grover Beach Potluck)
- Existing events/ meetings
- Make small changes!!!

## Common Obstacle 2: Only “usual suspects” show up

- Do you know who's missing?
- Targeted outreach
- Who are your community partners?
- Place/time considerations
- Why wouldn't you show up?
  - Think like a marketer
  - Think like a participant
- Even usual suspects can have an unusual experience!



# Common Obstacle 3: Meeting Gets Hijacked

- Design, design, design
- Break up groups
- Consider ground rules (but be careful!)

# Common Obstacle 4: We had a great process . . . that council ignored

- Goes back to preparedness
- Are decision makers onboard?
- Are decision makers engaged early  
And throughout the process?
- Do they really *hear* the voices?





# Obstacle 5: Residents are Disillusioned

- Did you CLOSE the loop?
- Are you engaging *too* much?

What other obstacles do you see?

# Additional resources

- Are You Ready to Engage pdf checklist
- Other Davenport Institute trainings/ webinars
- Professional Certificate (Feb & July 2020)
- ELGL blog - stay posted for September PE month theme!