



Community Engagement Strategies for Urban Forestry Projects

This document is designed to help you identify equitable outreach and collaboration strategies you can use in your urban forestry projects.

The International Association for Public Participation’s (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation outlines *the selection of the level of participation that defines the public’s role in any public participation process*.¹ As we move from left to right on the spectrum, we build community trust, confidence, and finally decision-making power. At each stage of the spectrum, there is a public participation goal and a promise that we make to the Public. The goal and the promise should be made publicly and at each stage, inviting a deeper level of community engagement.

IAP2 Spectrum for Public Participation

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION 

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public Participation Goal	Provide the public with information.	Obtain public feedback.	Work directly with the public.	Partner with the community in all aspects of the work.	Give power to the community to make final decisions
Promise to the Public	We will keep you informed...	...AND we listen to you, acknowledge you, and name how your feedback influenced us	We will work with you.	We will look to you to lead and guide.	We will implement what the community decides.



Source: *IAP2’s Spectrum of Public Participation* was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public’s role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.

In the table on the next page you will find strategies for each of the IAP2 participation levels. The first column of the table refers to the IAP2 level of public participation. The second column indicates the degree to which the strategy can contribute to building relationships with L = low, M = medium, and H = high. The third column describes the specific engagement strategy. The final column provides a space for you to take notes about the relevance of each strategy to your urban forestry project.

¹ [IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation © IAP2 International Federation 2018. All rights reserved. 20181112_v1](#)

Table of Engagement Strategies

IAP2 Level of Public Participation	Relationship Building	Strategy	Notes
Inform	M-H	Host educational workshops to increase awareness of the importance and benefits of urban trees.	
Inform	M-H	Have a booth at a neighborhood picnic where you provide information on tree species, care, and where to plant them.	
Inform	M-H	Set up interactive exhibits or displays at the local library or community center.	
Inform	M-H	Co-host events with other departments or organizations so that residents can learn about multiple opportunities at once (e.g. solar, community gardens, and trees).	
Inform	L-M	Develop a social media campaign.	
Inform	L	Put information in a community newsletter.	
Inform	L	Mail residents information about different species of trees, their care, and the ideal locations in which to plant them.	
Inform			
Consult	H	Create a neighborhood advisory group.	
Consult	M-H	Host focus group conversations at the neighborhood's school, daycare, or library.	
Consult	M-H	Partner with a local organization to host a neighborhood listening session or town hall.	
Consult	M-H	Set up a table at the local farmer's or outdoor market and invite people to complete a written or verbal survey to share their perspectives and needs.	

Consult	M-H	Engage local youth in surveying their neighbors (e.g. partner with the school, youth group, or teen center).	
Consult	L	Create a digital survey and share it via social media pages, websites, and e-newsletters.	
Consult	L	Place paper copies of a resident survey in high-traffic areas such as the grocery store, or a popular restaurant.	
Consult			
Involve	H	Organize community design/planning sessions where residents collaborate with experts to design tree planting initiatives for their neighborhoods.	
Involve	M-H	Hold a volunteer tree planting day. Involve the local school and neighborhood businesses.	
Involve	M-H	Partner with youth groups (e.g. 4H, Scouts, FFA) to deliver and help plant trees for those who need physical help.	
Involve	M-H	Ask residents to rank their preferences for trees and have urban forestry staff evaluate whether their selection is appropriate for the space.	
Involve	L-M	Allow residents to pre-select their desired tree from a list of available species.	
Involve	L	Provide material support for tree planting and care, such as stakes, rope, and mulch.	
Involve	L	Provide a variety of ways for residents to register for urban forestry programs (e.g. phone, email, via a web page, or via mail).	
Collaborate	H	Form a community planning committee or task force with diverse representation (residents, youth, local businesses, nonprofits) to guide tree canopy expansion efforts.	

Collaborate	H	Form community-led maintenance teams.	
Collaborate	M-H	Create partnership agreements with community and neighborhood organizations.	
Collaborate	M-H	Work with community members to promote government support for urban forestry programs in low-canopy communities by aligning your actions with the city’s strategic goals.	
Collaborate	L-M	Align your urban forestry programs with related city programs, such as “neighborhood improvement initiatives” to gain access to more funding for tree planting and care in low canopy areas.	
Collaborate			
Empower	H	Support community-led tree planting events where residents take the lead in selecting tree species, coordinating planting activities, and organizing maintenance efforts.	
Empower	H	Teach residents how to evaluate the space(s) where they want trees and have them select appropriate trees based on their evaluation.	
Empower	H	Develop a community-led grant program that provides financial assistance to residents who need help with stump removal, planting, or maintenance costs.	
Empower			

Next Steps - Use the ideas in this table to guide discussions with partners and community members, and develop an engagement action plan. Your engagement plan should include strategies across the levels of engagement. There may be times when you need to inform and consult to raise awareness and participation that will open the door for higher levels of engagement (collaborate and empower).

Adapted from a resource developed by Christine Carmicheal, Ph.D. 2024. Fair Forests Consulting.

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