Document Purpose

This document is designed to help those developing a Partners for Places (P4P) grant proposal understand what is typically involved in a successful community engagement process. It should be used as a resource for the kinds of engagement practices P4P is looking for in the Request for Proposals (RFP) criteria 4: *"Extent of successful engagement of priority audiences/stakeholders in project development and implementation, including people of color, people with low-incomes, and/or residents from immigrant or refugee communities."*

The Basics of Successful Community Engagement

Community members are engaged when they own the deliberations, discussions, decision-making and/or implementation of projects or programs impacting them. Accordingly, community leaders must understand their responsibilities of empowerment include the role of convener, facilitator, supporter, and collaborator. Developing community-level capacity to: 1) identify community priorities and plan for the long-term; 2) design and implement community development projects; and 3) mobilize resource investments begins with a sound and equitable community engagement strategy designed to obtain full ownership from key community stakeholders.

Key stakeholders should be a robust cross-section of residents, including people of color, people with low-incomes, and/or residents from immigrant or refugee communities. These communities often represent untapped community resources, and should be viewed as assets in the engagement process. The elements of acceptance, collaborative ownership, active listening and response, inclusivity, transparency, accountability, and collective learning should be the foundation of the engagement process.

Engagement strategies should not be prescribed or "top-down." Instead, stakeholders should be able to influence how outreach and engagement is conducted. Creating a safe environment for this ownership allows proposers to identify and understand differing values, priorities, viewpoints, ideas, solutions, alternatives, consequences, and perceived benefits and risks.

Building Community Engagement into Projects

While P4P does not dictate how a community should engage with its members, it is suggested that a diverse group of stakeholders be involved during the project development process.[1] This is so that if an award is made, community buy-in to the concept is not a barrier to launching the work. The community should be in full support and ready to engage around any awarded work. Basic elements of community engagement that have been tested and proven over time include the following:

- **Create an engagement plan**
    - o Develop a comprehensive list of stakeholders affected by the project or decision

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[1] While it is encouraged to start concept conversations with community members during the proposal development process, it is not required.

- o Define ideal roles for each impacted stakeholder group as suggested starting points
- o Identify specific engagement activities and expectations
- o Designate lead staff and resources (i.e. communications, facilitation, translation, etc.)
- o Develop a cross-departmental and organizational team to oversee communications
- o Make relationship-building a primary goal for each team member
- **Create internal and external checks and balances**
  - o Design for transparency, including sharing findings and how they are being incorporated
  - o Train staff on power, privilege, and institutional racism and bias
  - o Evaluate the engagement process regularly to adaptively adjust/replicate what works
  - o Create advisory groups, inviting several from each constituency, to avoid isolating people
- **Welcome with accessibility and resource provision**
  - o Co-host with other community leaders when possible to create balanced presentation
  - o Create an open, safe space that puts community members at ease
  - o Chose meeting venues where the community wants to be, during times they are available
  - o Provide food, drink, and child care
  - o Make the materials attractive and easy to digest/provide feedback on
  - o Make sure the meetings are accessible to people with disabilities and language barriers
  - o Offer multiple methods for communication and feedback to appeal to all generations
  - o Look for opportunities to support training and education, or access to funding
  - o Seek advice frequently, with humility and honesty

A helpful tip is to utilize lessons from successful communities and online resources when you are developing your community engagement plan.[2] Cite these resources in the proposal, so it is clear that the homework to launch a comprehensive community engagement plan has been done prior to submitting a proposal.

Knowing When Community Engagement is Successful

There are six simple ways[3] to measure the success of community engagement efforts:
- Capability: Community members are engaging in dialogue
- Commitment: Community members agree on mutual benefits beyond self-interest
- Contribution: Community members volunteer and are encouraged to take responsibility
- Continuity: Community members share/rotate roles using an established transition process
- Collaboration: Community members are operating in an environment of sharing and trust
- Conscience: Community members regularly use guiding principles expressed through service

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[2] *Beyond the Public Meeting: Raising the Bar for Equitable Community Engagement*; Community Economic Development Association of Michigan
[3] *What Makes Community Engagement Successful?*; Pennsylvania State University