

PlacemakingUS - Cafecito #4 - “Engaging Your Citizens”



Ryan

Welcome, this is a space to talk with your peers about issues and opportunities you might have had around “engaging your citizens” whether its moments when you’ve had the power and have been looking to engage citizens, or times where you and the voice of those around you haven’t been enough to make the changes and move the needles.

Sherryl

We’re here to talk about Engaging Our Citizens today. We have

Ethan

We build learning and advocacy networks around placemaking. Had international calls today and inviting folks to this space. I’m available to talk PlacemakingX. Tomorrow we launch AfterCovid.City declaration tomorrow. It’s a plan and a process for evolving cities after COVID.

Sherryl

Meditation and yoga so I’d like us to close our eyes and visualize things. Sounds hoakey. What does citizen engagement mean in your own life/work?

Madeleine

Beginning of organizing South Park, hubs of democratic power in every city. Even a karate club, a choir group, churches, beginning of community engagement starts by connecting with former groups

Ryan

Very de Tocqueville!

Sherryl

How do you find these hubs?

Madeleine

By making a list of who they are

Ryan

One thing I hear a lot is asking people you meet with, who you should meet with and keep going down the wormhole!

Michelle

The way I looked at community engagement was the wrong approach when I was elected. We take peoples sense of agency away. We take away what's powerful in the community. The smallest scale is neighborhood of 5,000-6,000, when we take that away. We are currently so polarized so the bigger systems of government are challenged to have productive dialogue. Sustainable community engagement is about welcoming everybody at all levels. We emerge through networks. Don't count on the government to save you. The resources are within democracy. Big fan of Cormac Russel in the UK and have evolved my thinking.

Sherryl

That's very frustrating

Michele

Through **Metropolitan Water District** tour of California gives board the opportunity to give local resident leaders tours to understand water rights and how water works, where it comes from and what the infrastructure looks like. It's an old program that started with the Hoover Dam. I'm probably one of the only electeds who brought residents from my own community versus consultants who sometimes get invited.

Asiyah

Camden Arts organization. People always think of Camden from a deficit. We have a challenge of people recognizing their own agency/efficacy. What we decided to do was go a little bit younger and introduced Social Justice through Collage Quilting at schools. We look at issues like why are there so much pollution. Why are there no grocery stores? We give these tools to young people to understand/articulate what is their reality. It's a long game. These kids are in 5th-7th grade. Engage citizenry in Camden.

Sherryl

Can you elaborate on what this looks like?

Asiyah

We read a poem and reflect and so that identity and feelings can be explored. We then have art supplies and an instruction set.

Cade

We've done a number of causal dip your toes into engagement things. Giving tours is one of my favorite ways to do that. People have been around the community. They like to imagine what the community used to be like. Topic of land use or parking lot distribution. I recently got some codes in front of the council. I almost found myself wanting to stifle democracy to get these things passed. I don't feel great about that but wanted to acknowledge it.

David

How do we organize the community to use the same language?

Sherryl

I use really populist terms and simple questions like "how do you go there?" Use tools anyone can access like Asiyah's idea of collaging is different than giving someone a survey. The true answer is deeper than of

Michelle

Community engagement is a strategic action. That's why PICO network and others have come around and specified ground rules for moving processes. Last night someone was describing a park and how to move it to be activated and

thew time it took and what I learned from the Pomegranete center, there needs to be movement and meetings if there is no momentum than it falls apart.
(<https://pomegranatecenter.org/>)

Ryan

For me, I find the best way is to define terms with the group in front of you.

Asiyah

We're not adamant that people use the term intersectionality or specific terms. We adopt all languages.

Dave

I was gonna offer a little bit of context. The word we're having trouble with is "affordability" as prices raise, we are having trouble with these types of terms as they get tossed around. Our projects are public-private partnerships. The pain point is everything is expensive.

Ryan

Ethan and I saw two girls holding a sign in a park "Talk to us about Queer Love" and they created positive space for a generative discussion on the topic so maybe you could have folks on benches saying "What does affordable mean to you?" which might evolve the discussion further.

Michele

Margaret Whitley, she's a hero of mine. Her book, "Who do you choose to be for this time?" Friend with Gracely Boggs in relation to community engagement and real tools. She utilized those and capitalized on those. Language matters because of our lived experience and our culture. Book by Brene Brown called "Atlas of the Heart." We're not even using words correctly. Today, affordable housing is "attainable" housing since there are geographic/market differences with wide disparities.

Madeleine

You really have to know the people and tools that is required. Sometimes we're too into our tools and it might not be the right one.

Sherryl

Tools are not one size fits all

Cade

Language can be useful. But its a process. One of the biggest need for technical language is the complexity of the laws. One solution is to simplify the policies so the language is not so necessary.

Boopsie

I agree with Madeleine that each area is specific and most people don't even know their electoral boundaries. I work in the street and in political arenas. The less technical language that moves things. Speak English. Speak Spanish. Speak the language(s) necessary. Up to 20 in SF.

Madeleine

In a transportation meeting, we found out there was no language to protect people. So maybe we need to really start over with systems like these that have left humans out of the beneficiary of our laws.

Sherryl

We can use loopholes and the laws rigidity to get around bureaucratic inefficiencies.

Ximena

What Madeleine said resonates because in engineering schools, they don't prioritize humans or human values. The community is the last thing you're supposed to think about. How do we get the people designing stuff. I am in Moscow but I am from Colombia and I see a lot of this profession gone wrong.

Sherryl

We host a space called Bourbonism to host a more relaxed atmosphere to talk about these topics.

Ryan

Check out Chuck Marone's new book "Confessions of a Recovering Engineer"