

Strengthening Inclusive Engagement in Communities

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Background

PURPOSE OF THIS TOOLKIT

The Strengthening Inclusive Engagement in Communities Toolkit serves as a user-friendly guide that provides free tools for livability leaders through their community engagement decision making and provides them with helpful tips to engage older adults.

THE BENEFITS OF INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH OLDER ADULTS (AND PEOPLE OF ALL AGES)

- Enriches understanding of diverse perspectives and lived experiences
- Supports more responsive and inclusive project processes and outcomes
- Strengthens civic engagement and community belonging
- Promotes volunteerism and community stewardship

ABOUT 8 80 CITIES

8 80 Cities is a non-profit organization based in Toronto, Ontario. We exist to improve the quality of life for people in cities by bringing citizens together to enhance parks, mobility, and public space so that together we can create more vibrant, healthy, and equitable communities. We believe that if everything we do in our public spaces is great for an 8-year-old and great for an 80-year-old, it will be great for all people.

ABOUT AARP

AARP is the United States' largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering people 50 or older to choose how they live as they age. With nearly 38 million members and offices in every state, Washington D.C., Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, AARP strengthens communities and advocates for what matters most to families, with a focus on health security, financial stability and personal fulfillment. The AARP Livable Communities initiatives programs include the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities and the annual AARP Community Challenge "quick-action" grant program.

Tool #1: 8 80 Rules of Engagement

Rule 1 - Take it to the Streets

Engaging people where they're at means talking to people in places where they already go and gather.

Questions to ask

- What are some places where people gather?
- Where should you go to reach different demographics?

Examples

- Community centers
- Transit stations
- Older adult homes
- Schools & Libraries

Rule 2 - Be Inclusive

For many people, there are significant barriers to participating in conventional community engagement events. These barriers may include a lack of child care options, transportation costs, mobility challenges, long work days, or language barriers.

Questions to ask

- What are some barriers to participation in this community?
- What are some ways to address these barriers?

Examples

- Provide on-site childcare
- Offer public transportation tickets
- Invite people to provide input in a variety of mediums
- Use images, icons, simple language, and translators (if necessary)

Rule 3 - Play with Purpose

Community engagement doesn't need to be a boring and stale process. Incorporate fun games and materials as a starting point for connection and conversation.

Questions to ask

- How can you make community engagement fun and interesting for participants?
- How can you grab people's attention as they are passing by?

Examples

- Hula hoops
- Music (portable speakers)
- Oversized games (ie. Checkers, Connect Four, Jenga)
- Sidewalk chalk

Rule 4 - Value People's Time

People are protective of their time. An honest and inclusive community engagement process will stand out among other calls for attention and input.

Questions to ask

- How can we show we value people's time in the community engagement process?
- If someone only has 30 seconds to speak to you, what would you say or ask?

Examples

- Listen closely and identify common themes
- Host events throughout the day to accommodate different schedules
- Bring food
- Be transparent about next steps and stay in touch

Rule 5 - Create Some Buzz

Traditional community consultation notices are often bland and uninspiring. Consider hosting or partnering with a fun and unique event that appeals to a wide audience. Use it as an opportunity to showcase your initiative and gather feedback from participants.

Questions to ask

- How will you get people excited about your initiative?
- What are some ways to make it exciting to engage?

Examples

- Outdoor movie night
- Storytelling event
- Block party
- Community long table dinner

Rule 6 - Take Action

Many people feel their feedback doesn't matter. The best way to break this skepticism is to take immediate and meaningful action to bring people's ideas to life.

Questions to ask

- What are some 'quick wins' you can implement to reflect the community's feedback?
- Who shares the same vision as you and can be the local champions and organizers for your project?

Examples

- Report back the findings from the community engagement
- Implement pilot projects based on community feedback
- Measure, evaluate, and refine the pilot projects
- Look for community leaders to work with

Tool #2: Community Engagement Planning

Step 1

Thinking of your objective and the community impact you want to have, list 3 underrepresented priority groups among older adults you need to hear from early, before implementing your project (e.g., immigrant older adults, older adults of color, low-income older adults, older adults with disabilities etc.).

KEY QUESTIONS: Who is your target group, i.e. who would benefit from projects like yours? Who COULD benefit but is missing from your city's / your organization's / your decision-making processes?

Priority Group #1	
Priority Group #2	
Priority Group #3	

Step 2

For each priority group you listed, what are existing events, meetings, locations (including online spaces like Facebook groups or neighborhood apps), organizations, or trusted community members/leaders in your city that can help you reach them?

KEY QUESTIONS: When and where do these groups already meet or spend time? If you aren't sure, who can you ask?

Priority Group	Events/meetings	Locations	Organizations/community leaders

Step 3

Identify how you might be able to engage this group, especially through the community assets from Step 2. Examples might include creative outreach methods, joining in on existing events or meetings, holding new events in popular locations, etc.

KEY QUESTIONS: How can you adapt in-person ideas to accommodate accessibility/physical distancing? How can you adapt digital methods to accommodate older adults who are not tech-savvy?

Additional Thoughts

What will help ensure that your efforts are accessible and welcoming? How will you thank or show appreciation to participants for their time and input? If you aren't sure what might be needed or appreciated by your participants, who can you ask for suggestions?

How you will ensure accessibility and inclusion?	
How will you thank or show appreciation to participants for their time and input?	

Tool #3: Evaluation & Measuring Success

The purpose of this tool is to practice creating an evaluation plan for your community engagement.

Goal	What will success look like?	How will you measure success?	Target?

Tool #4: Communications Plan

Step 1: Identify your audience

Think about the groups/organizations identified Community Engagement Planning Tool (Tool #2) and note when you should contact them and your communications goals for each audience.

Audience	Timing (When should you contact them? Where does this fit into your timeline?)	Communication Goals (What is your goal? What do you want them to do at the end of your message/conversation?)

Step 2: Your project description. Key messages.

What other key messages should you mention when you talk to each audience type? Are there certain words or specific references that you should use or avoid with different audiences?

KEY QUESTION: What would make this audience want to work with you?

Audience	One-sentence project description for this audience	Key messages, keywords, or key references