

Public Engagement Spectrum Snapshot: Incorporate

Over the past few months, we have been inviting you both to ask “what is it that we are trying to do as we engage the public?” and to let the answer drive the process you use to engage. We have been taking a look back at the spectrum of engagement¹ through the lens of the pandemic to equip you to take the risk of inviting residents to live into their identity as citizens (regardless of immigration status). This month’s spotlight is on the third stage of the spectrum: **Incorporating** public feedback or concerns into policy solutions

As we move from consulting to incorporating, we are asking more from residents: more time, more attention, more listening, more working together. We are also asking more from decision-makers: more listening, more willingness to consider different approaches, perspectives and solutions.

Once again, it is important to remember that the engagement spectrum is a *spectrum* and not a ladder. The goal is not to get as far up the ladder as possible, but rather to make sure that your *purpose* is driving your planning.

Incorporating public feedback may mean partnering with the public to develop alternatives or identify preferred solutions. It may also mean inviting residents to set the criteria that will be used to assess any options on the table. This stage of the process can unearth creative solutions that your team may not have identified. Government remains the final decision maker, but is inviting the public to become partners in identifying solutions.

While information and consultation processes are often focused on hearing from as many people as possible, numbers are not the primary concern for processes seeking to incorporate the public. Instead, the goal is diversity (including sometimes reaching out to the advocates or representatives of underrepresented groups) and creating a space for people to hear each others stories and share ideas. This may include allowing the conversation to be uncomfortable at times - creative solutions often arise only after people get “stuck” for a while!

This is a particular challenge in the online space, because working together requires building some rapport or trust. But there are ways of creating connections and building relationships online.

Platforms like Zoom offer polling features that can provide space for people to provide anonymous feedback and get a sense of the diversity in the room. If you don’t have access to polling features on your platform, [Slido](#) is a free tool for audience polling that can be used alongside any platform. Breakout rooms can allow for fun icebreakers and even the chat box can provide space for more personal connections using creative prompts.

One resource we’ve discovered recently is [Liberating Structures](#). They are looking at ways of shifting how we think of meetings in order to create space for all voices both online and offline.

To find out more about some favorite “incorporating” projects the Davenport Institute has been involved in (pre-pandemic), check out our case stories about the [Tennyson Corridor project](#) in Hayward or the [Humboldt Bay Municipal Water District](#).

¹ The Davenport uses a simplified version of the [IAP2 Spectrum of Public Engagement](#) based on what we have seen as the most common purposes of local government engagement