

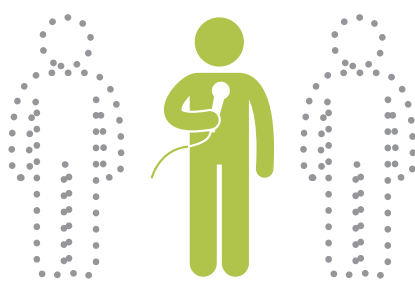
# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT in California

Highlights from  
research with  
local officials  
and civic leaders

## OPPORTUNITY FOR CHANGE

Public meetings often **do not** meet the needs of residents or local officials.

Public comment agendas are **dominated by narrow interests and negative remarks**



**Large segments of the public are missing**, especially low-income populations, immigrants and young people

Many **desire** broad-based public participation and stronger collaboration.

## WHAT THEY ARE SAYING

### LOCAL PUBLIC OFFICIALS (ELECTED AND NONELECTED)

900 surveyed

### BOTH GROUPS

### LEADERS OF CIVIC AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

462 surveyed

#### Appreciate the value of public engagement

**77%** are interested in hearing more about practices that have worked in other places.

Feel local officials want to see improved public engagement

#### Report that many local officials are trying to better engage the public

**41%** say local officials seem to be making more of an effort to engage a wide variety of people.

#### View the public as disengaged

**87%** say that community members are too busy with day-to-day life to get involved in public decision making.

Are concerned about the disconnect between the public and local officials

#### Find the relationship between the public and local government is deeply strained

**77%** say the public has become angrier and mistrustful of local officials in recent years.

#### Endorse more deliberative processes, but are cautious

**67%** believe deliberative engagement can bring out fresh ideas; 60% think such approaches should be used for only a few public decisions.

Want more thoughtful, inclusive processes that foster dialogue, trust and better decisions

#### Support more deliberative processes, but worry about lack of follow through

**83%** think such approaches can result in better understanding of public concerns; 38% believe these processes may frustrate participants if officials don't act on the results.

## SIGNS OF PROGRESS

**53%** of local public officials have collaborated with community organizations to engage residents in dialogue.

**61%** of civic leaders say that working with a local official has been effective in building community trust.

**90%** of local public officials can think of an issue that lends itself well to deeper engagement, such as:



Land use, housing and economic development



Long-term community goal setting



Finances and budgets

## TAKING ACTION FOR STRONGER PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

### Local officials and their institutions can gain from:

- Partnering with community-based organizations
- Hiring and training staff to increase public engagement skills
- Networking with colleagues who have effective practices
- Evaluating local efforts



### Civic leaders and their organizations can gain from:

- Partnering with local officials
- Hiring and training staff to increase public engagement skills
- Networking and sharing resources with other organizations
- Evaluating local efforts

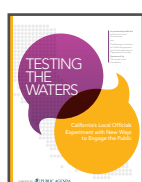


### Funders can make a difference by supporting:

- Partnerships between public officials and local organizations
- Trainings and technical assistance
- Experiments, including use of online engagement tools
- Research, evaluation and knowledge sharing



## READ THE REPORTS



**For Local Officials:**  
**Testing the Waters**  
California Local Officials Experiment with New Ways to Engage the Public



**For Civic Leaders:**  
**Beyond Business as Usual**  
Leaders of California's Civic Organizations Seek New Ways to Engage the Public in Local Governance



**For All:**  
**Executive Summaries**  
Key research findings and recommendations

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