NJ HOMES

Community Engagement

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WORKSHOP SERIES

Community Engagement for Local Housing Decisions



NEW JERSEY FUTURE

Overview Agenda

1. **Foundations of Engagement**
   Welcome · Defining Community Engagement · Why Engage?
2. **Strategic Planning & Goals**
   Establishing Engagement Goals · Determining the Desired Outcome
3. **The Ladder of Engagement**
   Inform · Consult · Involve · Collaborate · Empower
4. **Execution & Tactics**
   When and Who to Engage · Leaders and Messengers · How to Engage
5. **Troubleshooting & Wrap-Up**
   Common Barriers and Pitfalls · Next Steps and Summary

MODULE 1

Foundations of Engagement

What is Community Engagement? Definition & Purpose

Community engagement in this context is the process of helping local governments ensure that housing decisions accurately address the lived experiences of residents.



What is Community Engagement?



Intentional



Collaborative

Why Engage the Community?



Trust

People are far less likely to oppose something they helped shape, or at least something they understood from the start.



Knowledge

Localized knowledge makes projects better. They can inform the process.



Fighting Stigma

Open talks can break down misconceptions that erode opportunities.

Key Principles for Community Engagement around Housing

Effective community engagement around housing follows these three principles:

PRINCIPLE 01

Ensure residents have real input before decisions are finalized, rather than after the fact.

PRINCIPLE 02

Give developers clear, predictable, and early access to community input and regulatory expectations to reduce delays.

PRINCIPLE 03

Create shared forums where residents and developers can communicate directly, building trust and fighting stigma around affordable housing.

Principle 1: Ensure Residents Have Real Input

PRINCIPLE 01

Ensure residents have real input before decisions are finalized, rather than after the fact.



Principle 2: Share Information with Developers

PRINCIPLE 02

Give developers clear, predictable, and early access to community input and regulatory expectations to reduce delays.



Principle 3: Create Shared Forums

PRINCIPLE 03

Create shared forums where residents and developers can communicate directly, building trust and fighting stigma around affordable housing.



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MODULE 2

Strategic Planning & Goals

Establishing a Goal

"By the end of this process, we want the community to ___."

What does success look like for this initiative?

Core Impact & Goal Alignment

Core Differences

Feature	Goals	Outcomes
What it is	Broad, general statements of what you intend to do.	Specific, observable, and measurable end-results.
Focus	Inward/institutional ("what we aim to achieve").	External/beneficiary ("how people or conditions changed").
Measurability	Often qualitative, high-level, or unmeasurable on its own.	Concrete and trackable (percentages, counts, shifts in behavior).
Control	Controllable actions and milestones.	The ultimate effect, which can be influenced but relies on community response.
Answering...	*"What are we trying to do?"*	*"So what? What changed as a result?"*

Core Impact & Goal Alignment: Example

Goal: Ensure residents have a meaningful voice in the redevelopment of the Riverside housing complex.

Activities (what we control):

- Hold bilingual workshops on weekday evenings with food and childcare.
- Knock on 500 doors to share information.
- Create a resident advisory committee.

Outcomes (what changed):

- Resident attendance at planning meetings grew by 200%.
- The final design incorporated three resident-requested changes, including more family-sized units and a community room.
- Residents reported a measurable increase in confidence that they could influence local decisions.

MODULE 3

The Ladder of Engagement

Framework Overview: The Ladder of Engagement

Civic Decision-Making Shift

The Ladder of Engagement represents a fundamental shift in how municipalities interact with their residents during housing decisions.

5. Empower
Placing final decision-making power in hands of residents

4. Collaborate
Partnering in each aspect of decision & solution development

3. Involve
Working directly with public to ensure concerns are understood

2. Consult
Obtaining community feedback on analysis, options, or decisions

1. Inform
Providing balanced, objective information to assist understanding



1. Inform

Ladder Rung 1: Inform (Giving Clear Information)

Goal: Provide clear, accessible information to help the public understand local housing issues.

- **Planners' Role:** Keep the community updated with accurate data.
- **Community Role:** Listen and learn about upcoming projects.
- **Tactics:** Distribute plain-language one-pagers, translated materials (in English and the second most fluently spoken language), and utilize local advertising like flyers and social media toolkits.





2. Consult

Ladder Rung 2: Consult (Gathering Public Feedback)

Goal: Gather direct feedback on housing plans and choices.

- **Planners' Role:** Listen to the community and report on how feedback impacts decisions.
- **Community Role:** Provide constructive feedback on proposed developments.
- **Tactics:** Utilize online comment portals with published responses, host focus groups, and distribute online surveys to ensure input is systematically collected and reviewed.



3. Involve

Ladder Rung 3: Involve (Direct Resident Partnership)

Goal

Work directly with residents to ensure their needs are integrated into the plan.

Roles

- **Planners' Role:** Allow community ideas to shape available housing options.
- **Community Role:** Help shape development ideas from the very start.

Tactics

- Host town halls within the community at accessible venues.
- Conduct educational workshops with identified experts to build local capacity.



Ladder Rung 3: Involve (Direct Resident Partnership)







4. Collaborate

Ladder Rungs 4: Collaborate

Collaborate

Partner as equals through joint planning workshops and facilitated discussions where residents, business owners, and developers work through proposals together.



Ladder Rungs 4: Collaborate

Community Benefits Agreement:

A contract between the community and the developer, oftentimes including the municipality, that lays out specific responsibilities and outcomes for a project.



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5. Empower

Ladder Rungs 5: Empower

Empower

Shift final decision-making power to the community. This can be achieved through mechanisms like citizen-formed resident advisory boards, neighborhood voting on budget funds, or the establishment of community land trusts.



The Ladder of Engagement

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MODULE 4

Execution & Tactics

When to Engage: Key Project Phases in Housing Decisions

Engagement must occur early and throughout the lifecycle of a housing project:

- **Visioning Phase:** Setting initial goals before plans are drawn.
- **Site Selection:** Gathering input on appropriate locations.
- **Planning & Design:** Working through proposals and zoning requirements.
- **Drafting Rules:** Establishing local regulatory expectations.
- **Ongoing Review:** Continuous feedback as projects are developed.

Who to Engage: Geographic & Affinity Boundaries

INTENTIONAL OUTREACH & INCLUSION

"Municipalities must intentionally design their processes for inclusion from the start. This means specifically targeting outreach to ensure that residents in underserved or historically excluded neighborhoods have a guaranteed seat at the table during housing discussions."

Leadership & Messengers: Finding Effective Community Voices

Community Outreach Leaders

Trusted Local Messengers

Identify authentic local leaders and community advocates to spearhead dialogue. Leveraging trusted voices significantly boosts credibility and ensures communication is well-received.



Strategic Coalition Building in Community Housing

Knowing when to assemble a multi-stakeholder coalition versus taking direct action:

WHEN TO BUILD A COALITION

Best for Complex, High-Stakes Initiatives

- **Systemic Housing Policy:** Comprehensive plans or major zoning overhauls.
- **Diverse Opposition:** Bridging divides between residents, developers, and local officials.
- **Broad Buy-In Needed:** Securing long-term commitment via Community Benefits Agreements.
- **Resource Sharing:** Pooling outreach toolkits, translated media, and local networks.

WHEN NOT TO BUILD A COALITION

Best for Routine or Rapid-Response Tasks

- **Routine Administrative Tasks:** Standard compliance updates or technical municipal training.
- **Urgent Deadlines:** Time-sensitive regulatory filings requiring immediate action.
- **Misaligned Core Goals:** When stakeholder interests are fundamentally hostile to affordable housing.
- **Broad Consensus Exists:** Direct outreach or town halls are sufficient on their own.

Best Practices: How to Build an Effective Coalition

Key strategic steps for assembling and sustaining impactful housing coalitions:

1

Align Core Mission

- Shared Vision: Define explicit, non-negotiable housing goals early.
- Ground Rules: Establish operational norms and decision frameworks.
- Expectations: Clarify member roles and commitments.

2

Engage Diverse Partners

- Broad Table: Include residents, developers, & local officials.
- Inclusion: Prioritize historically excluded communities.
- Neutral Facilitation: Use third-party moderators.

3

Pool Shared Resources

- Toolkits: Share outreach materials & social media.
- Translation: Provide multilingual assets.
- Networks: Leverage combined partner outreach.

4

Formalize Agreements

- CBAs: Use Community Benefits Agreements.
- Clear Metrics: Define success & accountability.
- Feedback Loops: Maintain active dialogue.

How to Engage: Inclusive Outreach Tactics

To ensure participation, go where the people are and remove barriers to entry:

Location & Timing

Host events at easily accessible community venues with accommodating schedules.

Accessibility

Provide translated materials, food, and childcare.

Communication

Use clear, plain language and provide both digital tools (RSVP links) and paper tools (flyers).

Representation

Ensure diverse voices are actively recruited.

How to Engage: Inclusive Outreach Tactics

To ensure participation, go where the people are and remove barriers to entry:



Community Baby Shower, Orange NJ



Music on Main, Orange NJ

How to Engage: Inclusive Outreach Tactics

To ensure participation, go where the people are and remove barriers to entry:



Trenton Community Day, Trenton NJ



School Nurses Meeting, Trenton NJ

MODULE 5

Troubleshooting & Wrap - Up

Overcoming Barriers & Outreach Implementation Checklist

Ensure your engagement strategy avoids common pitfalls by checking these essential elements:

Timing Check

Are meetings scheduled when working residents can attend? Is the location easily accessible within the community?

Representation

Have you done broader outreach to hear from the quieter majority? Are materials free of confusing zoning jargon?

Feedback Loop

Are you utilizing sign-in sheets for follow-up and demonstrating "We Heard, We Did"?

Key Takeaways

Successful engagement requires engaging early, designing for inclusion, and facilitating shared agreements.

1. Community engagement is an intentional, collaborative process.
2. Start with a clear goal.
3. Choose the right rung on the Ladder of Engagement.
4. Engage early, map your stakeholders broadly, and use trusted messengers.
5. Close the loop.

Resources

Essential Resources

- Community Engagement Toolkit: Building Purpose and Participation
- Community Engagement for Local Housing Decisions
- Housing Solutions Lab – NYU Furman Center
- Community Benefit Agreement Database: Columbia Law School

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