

More Hands, More Voices

The Greater Hartford Civic Participation Project



Sponsored by the Capitol Region Council of Governments with support from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving

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ABOUT THE WRITER

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INTRODUCTION

Empty seats on town boards and commissions...decreasing voter turnout rates...dwindling memberships in civic organizations...difficulty involving young people and new people in town, particularly members of new demographic groups. This litany of concerns has become all too familiar in communities across America in recent years. In municipalities large, small and in-between, community leaders have discussed and lamented the reluctance of citizens to participate in civic life and have sought reasons and solutions for their disconnectedness.

In his book, *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam added substance to these perceptions by analyzing survey responses to Roper polls from 1973 forward that documented the decline in civic involvement. He identified a number of factors that contributed to this decline, including generational change, the pressures of time and money, increasing commuting time and, in particular, television and other electrical entertainment and their effects on community.

Democracy is government “of the people, by the people and for the people.” How can it work – on any level – when many of “the people” choose not to be involved? And what will be the quality of our

THE GREATER HARTFORD CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Many Greater Hartford communities have shared this experience of declining citizen participation. At meetings and retreats of the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG), town officials have expressed concern about disappearing voters and sparsely attended public meetings and frustration about the difficulty of recruiting people – especially new people – to staff boards and committees.

Early in 2001, area communities were invited to submit proposals to participate in a pilot project to address such issues. Funded by a grant from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, the Civic Participation Project was sponsored by and built on a framework developed by the National Civic League.

Five communities responded to the opportunity the project offered: Enfield, Hartford, Manchester, Wethersfield and Windsor. While these towns differ significantly in characteristics such as size and demographics, all expressed a desire to improve their communities by building broader and more inclusive civic participation. All were ready to build partnerships between town and school officials and the nonprofit sector, to promote participation by diverse groups in the community and to commit adequate resources

What is Civic Infrastructure?

“Civic infrastructure” is a concept used by the National Civic League to refer to “formal and informal processes and networks through which communities make decisions and attempt to solve problems.” NCL’s Civic Index, which served as a basis for the Civic Participation Pilot Project, is designed to help communities evaluate the health of their civic in-

They were also willing to lead the way for other towns that might follow the same path in the future by sharing their experiences for the benefit of other communities.

Those experiences form the basis for this manual, which describes the various steps in the journey the five communities traveled. Each town ultimately arrived at its own unique set of priorities and plan of action, yet each followed a similar process to get there. This manual will focus on the process they followed and some of the participants’ reflections on their experience. It is based on observation of the sessions, on follow-up interviews with town officials and other participants and on the National Civic League’s generous permission to share the process they developed and facilitated.

The follow-up interviews elicited many suggestions for possible modifications and in-

considerable room for flexibility in the process. Though many of those suggested modifications have been incorporated into this manual, communities that initiate this process are likely to seek other changes that will fit their needs and situations. While the basic framework of the process is proven as an effective approach, customizing it to fit a particular community will only sharpen its effectiveness.

WHAT IS THE CIVIC PARTICIPATION PROJECT?

The Civic Participation Project developed by the National Civic League involves a series of activities that may stretch over a number of months. The process begins with the critical task of organizing a steering committee of 12 to 20 community leaders who will coordinate the project.

A committed, hard-working steering committee is a major ingredient in the civic participation process, for it plays a central role in initiating and managing the flow of events. Its members identify, recruit and communicate with stakeholders, develop the local process design and timetable, organize committees, identify and locate the resources necessary, deal with schedules and logistics and

The first stage of the project is a planning phase that is conducted by the steering committee. The civic assessment phase is composed of three to four stakeholder meetings, with various planning and follow-up activities occurring in the intervals between each meeting. Finally, the implementation phase entails follow-up on key performance areas identified in the assessment.

The entire process of the Civic Participation Project is described in the pages that follow, along with examples and guidelines drawn from the experience of the piloting communities.

NOTE: THE APPENDIX INCLUDES VARIOUS MATERIALS THAT PARTICIPATING TOWNS CAN USE OR ADAPT

What Does the Project Aim to Do?

The overall goal of the Civic Participation Project is to build strong communities by encouraging more civic participation. In order to accomplish this goal, the process addresses three key objectives:

- ? *Identifying the challenges to civic engagement within the community;*
- ? *Assessing the community's civic infrastructure;*
- ? *Developing action plans to address the identified challenges to civic participation.*

Possible benefits from the project include:

1. *A stronger civic sector as measured by participation in local government by people representing all the diverse groups that make up a town;*
2. *Increases in the number of volunteers in various town and civic activities;*
3. *Longer retention rates for people who serve as volunteers in municipal government and civic groups;*
4. *Local leadership opportunities that are welcoming, attractive and rewarding for a diverse cross-section of townspeople;*
5. *More citizen ownership of their local government through increased participation in public meetings and in voting;*
6. *More interested people to help conduct the important business of local*

PROCEDURES

Details such as scheduling, location and record-keeping are important elements of an initiative such as the Civic Participation process. Each community works in its own unique way, and logistical arrangements should be built around local needs. Nevertheless, the experience of the five towns in the pilot project may be helpful in dealing with some of the procedural issues and in identifying the resources needed to complete the process.

Facilitation: The pilot project meetings were facilitated by the National Civic League. While NCL's participation represents an optimal situation, it might not be a possibility for towns that undertake this process in the future. However, all the town officials interviewed for this manual agreed on the need for a skilled facilitator to run the meetings. As one official explained, "It would be desirable to have a facilitator who is familiar with the issue of civic participation, but the most important

qualification is good skills. You need someone who can keep people on task and moving forward toward the goal."

Timing: Pilot project meetings were held in the early evening, generally starting at 5:00 or 5:30 p.m., and they began with dinner (a box meal, pizza, etc.). While all interviewees agreed that the three-hour meetings were long, opinions were mixed regarding the workability of the length. Most felt that it was necessary in order to make significant progress on the tasks; a few felt that the length was counter-productive. With some agenda modifications, it would be possible to hold shorter meetings and to meet more frequently, if that is desired. The early evening hour and the provision of dinner were highly commended.

The stakeholder meetings in the pilot project were scheduled once a month. If necessary, the process could be compressed into a shorter time period, with meetings held

How to Assemble a Steering Committee

When recruiting for the Steering Committee, try to include the following;

- ? *School Board representative(s) – elected and appointed*
- ? *Strong representation from your town's civic leadership – churches, nonprofits, neighborhood associations, service clubs (League of Women Voters, Rotary, etc.)*
- ? *Business leaders in town – local chamber of commerce, business or professional associations*
- ? *Municipal representation – chief elected official, council representatives, town manager, registrars of voters*
- ? *Other leaders or emerging leaders in town, especially those representing the diversity*

and could even be adapted for a retreat. While no one in any town seems to have found a season that isn't busy, scheduling around a town's cycle of activities, elections and holidays may help avoid some pitfalls.

Location: The locational needs for the program are relatively simple – a room large enough to seat all the participants comfortably and flexible enough to accommodate breakout groups of various sizes. It should also be an area (or have access to an area) where it is possible to serve, eat and clean up a simple meal quickly and easily. Another consideration: try to avoid locations with distractions such as extraneous noise (as from other nearby activities) or large numbers of people passing through.

Record-keeping: Each meeting will produce ideas, plans and other material that will need to be recorded, organized and communicated back to the group. The facilitator or an assistant, for instance, will record on an easel pad the ideas that are generated by discussions, and they will need to be compiled and distributed so they can serve as the basis of subsequent discussions. Some of these materials will be prepared by volunteers from the group, but it would be helpful to have a support person (perhaps from town or library staff) available to work with the facilitator on other records.

Six Suggestions for Informing the Public

1. *Stay in touch with the newspapers that serve your town. Send them press releases, invite them to attend a meeting, arrange an interview.*
2. *If you have any community newsletters, provide regular reports and articles for publication.*
3. *Send interim and final reports on the process to local governmental bodies and civic organizations, and/or ask project participants to report in person.*
4. *Put the reports on the town's web site.*
5. *Organize presentations on local cable access television stations.*
6. *Place flyers, brochures and reports in*

Communications: The nature of communications to stakeholders and steering committee members will probably vary in different towns, but it's likely that most will find it necessary to convey some types of information between meetings (meeting notes, summaries, agendas, etc.). One indispensable form of communication is meeting reminders to maintain attendance over time. Some of the communities in the pilot project sent out reminder letters, some sent postcards, some even followed up the

record-keeping, responsibility for communications may be assigned to support staff or volunteers.

External communications are also important to consider. Information that goes out to the general public and key groups can help generate interest and awareness and lay the groundwork for

Ground Rules for Discussion

The following ground rules for discussion will encourage participation:

1. *Everybody participates*
 2. *Active listening*
 3. *One person speaks at a time*
 4. *Keep comments laser sharp – concise and to the point*
 5. *Don't shoot down other people's ideas*
 6. *Work as a team*
 7. *Have fun and celebrate your accomplishments*
-

THE PLANNING PHASE

The process developed for the Civic Participation Project begins with an organizational meeting of the steering committee, which provides an opportunity to sharpen members' understanding of the project's purpose and process and to begin to tackle steering committee tasks. The process suggested for this initial meeting includes the following activities:

1. **Introduction:** Even if many of the steering committee members are already acquainted with each other, a brief introduction, including a few words about their perspective on and hopes for the project will help set the stage for further discussion.
2. **Project background, process and structure:** It would be helpful to include a short briefing on the concept and history of the Civic Participation Project, including the research of authors such as Robert Putnam (*Bowling Alone*), the work of the National Civic League and the pilot project. This information could be provided by an informed facilitator, by a CRCOG staff member or perhaps by a guest from one of the pilot project communities.
3. **Group discussion on the project's purpose and parameters:** It's impor-

common definition of civic participation, though it can be as broad as necessary to accommodate the group's vision. From that beginning, the next step is to identify specific areas and activities of civic participation and to define a limited number of goals (perhaps three) that reflect the needs and priorities of the communities. (See sidebar for examples.)

4. Introduction to stakeholder

analysis: The selection and recruitment of stakeholders is critically important to the success of the Civic Participation project. To build a broad-based stakeholder group, steering committee members may begin by analyzing the various interests and perspectives in the community.

5. Set dates for follow-up meetings of the steering committee:

The steering committee will probably need to meet several times in order to prepare the groundwork for the first stakeholder meeting. The specific tasks to be accomplished include:

- ? Finalizing the stakeholder analysis and developing invitation and recruitment strategies for stakeholders;
- ? Selecting a chair or co-chairs;
- ? Choosing a project name;
- ? Deciding who will be responsible for record-keeping, communications, etc.;

- ? Identifying and coordinating with other community efforts that have similar goals;
- ? Identifying and locating the resources needed; e.g., staff support, facilitator, CRCOG, guest speakers, etc.

A final meeting sometime before the first stakeholder session should be planned as a time to check that all the necessary arrangements have been completed. At this meeting, the steering committee can review the list of stakeholders who will attend and fill in any gaps and refine their articulation of the specific areas of civic participation that should be addressed.

Examples of Town Goals/Themes

Every community's civic infrastructure has unique features and unique problems. In order to address areas of concern that are relevant to the community, the steering committee should identify several specific themes that will be the focus of their town's project. Examples of some of these goals might include:

- ? *Increasing voter turnout*
- ? *Increasing membership on boards and commissions*
- ? *Increasing membership in civic organizations*
- ? *Encouraging involvement by young people*

Six Tips for Identifying and Recruiting Stakeholders

1. *Identify the variety of interests and perspectives. Besides the prominent groups that come to mind quickly, try to include people representing other perspectives. Consider perspectives such as age groups, gender, ethnicity, religion, long-term and new residents, homeowners and renters, socioeconomic status and occupation.*
2. *Begin to fill in names. Be sure that you push beyond the "usual suspects" to include people who are not typically involved in this type of community dialogue.*
3. *Get addresses, phone numbers and e-mails of all the people on the list.*
4. *Enter the list into a database or spreadsheet.*
5. *Identify and begin recruitment strategies. An invitation letter is the easiest way to communicate with potential stakeholders, but consider whether an alternate approach would work better with some of the people on your list. A follow-up phone call can be exceedingly effective – the personal touch works!*
6. *Check in as you get close to your final count. Is your group reflecting the diversity that you're look*

STAKEHOLDERS MEETINGS

Stakeholder Meeting #1 The Kick-off Meeting

The kick-off meeting, which brings all the stakeholders together for the first time, is focused on three objectives:

- ? Understanding of the goals and process of the Civic Participation project;
- ? Developing a vision for healthy and vital civic participation;
- ? Assessing the challenges and barriers to more active civic participation.

The structure of the meeting includes the following elements:

1. Introduction: To set a climate conducive to discussion, it's worthwhile to begin by asking people to introduce themselves – especially considering that the steering committee has probably recruited a number of people who are new to civic activities. If the group is very large, this step may not be realistic. Alternatively, participants could introduce themselves within the smaller groups that will be formed.

2. Project background: A presentation on the concept of civic participation and the history of the project will help orient the participants to the relevant issues and provide an opportunity to clarify the project's structure and purpose. This background may be presented by a

3. Visioning exercise: The participants will be divided into smaller groups (e.g., ten to twelve people), instructed to appoint a facilitator and a recorder and asked to discuss the following question: “If our town had healthy and thriving civic participation, what would it look like? What would we see?” Or, alternatively, you could ask, “What does civic participation at its optimal level look like?”

After brainstorming and listing their ideas, the small group will then decide on five to seven critical themes in their vision of civic participation in their community and record them as succinctly as possible.

The whole group will then re-convene, and each small group will report back on its selection of vision themes. The next step is to identify and list the common themes that have emerged in the small groups.

4. Large group discussion of barriers and challenges:

After reviewing the vision themes, the large group will consider the question: “What are the barriers and challenges that keep us from reaching our vision?” The ideas that are offered should be recorded as the discussion proceeds.

5. Vision drafting team: A group of volunteers should be recruited to serve as a vision drafting team. This team’s

Examples of Vision Themes

Some of the vision themes identified through the first Stakeholder Meeting have included:

- ? *A local government that actively encourages people to volunteer*
- ? *An abundant pool of volunteers from a cross-section of the community*
- ? *Active involvement of young people in civic activities*
- ? *Ongoing development of community leadership*
- ? *Flexibility and creativity in developing roles for citizens, local governments, nonprofits and businesses*
- ? *Neighborhoods where people know and are involved with each other*
- ? *High voter turnout and informed voters*

Preparation for Stakeholder Meeting #2

In the interval between the first and second meeting, two tasks should be completed. The vision drafting team should write a short vision statement for civic participation in their community. In addition, the project facilitator/chairperson/steering committee should identify the major themes and barriers of the vision discussion. The next step is to develop questions about each theme in order to focus the second meeting on priority areas for the community’s civic assessment. A helpful tool for this process is the National Civic League’s *Civic Index*, which identifies a number of major themes and suggests questions for the discussion of each one.

An example may show more concretely how this step works. In one of the piloting towns, “Volunteerism” was identified as an important theme, and the following questions were developed to assess it:

- ? How is information about volunteering opportunities made available? Is it widely available?
- ? How do we recruit volunteers? What are the methods?
- ? How do we sustain volunteers? Do we recognize them publicly?
- ? Are we clear about what we ask of volunteers? Do they understand the time requirements? Are we explicit about the goals of their service? Is their work linked

ethnicities and perspectives recruited?
 ? How do businesses and corporations support volunteerism?

**Stakeholder Meeting # 2:
 Civic Assessment**

At the second meeting, participants investigate their community, targeting specific themes and aiming to achieve two major outcomes:

- ? Validating a shared vision for enhanced civic participation and producing a finalized vision statement;
- ? Assessing critical areas of civic participation through the NCL’s *Civic Index* and other tools that target the town’s specific interest areas. The result of this process is specific information on indicators of the town’s civic health.

The process suggested to reach these goals includes the following:

- 1. Review of the last meeting:** Since several weeks may have passed since the first meeting, it would be helpful to begin by summarizing the activities of that meeting and briefly describing the agenda for the second meeting.
- 2. Review the statement of purpose:** The entire group will review the statement created by the volunteer group and suggest revisions and refinements. While minimal time should be devoted to this part of the process, it’s important for the

3. The civic themes: The process that was used to extract the civic themes from the many areas identified at the first meeting will be explained and discussed, along with the questions that accompany each theme. Following this presentation, the group will have an opportunity to provide feedback about the themes. Then, participants will divide into small groups, one for each theme, with participants selecting the group they wish to join. After appointing a facilitator and recorder, each group will discuss the thematic questions. Based on this discussion, the individual groups will then summarize and record the strengths and assets that support the civic theme they examined and the barriers and challenges that obstruct it. It's important to ensure that there is sufficient time to discuss barriers and challenges, as this information will help guide the next phase of the process.

4. Reporting back on the civic assessment exercise: To complete the civic assessment process, the small groups will report their findings of assets/obstacles to the large group for comment and discussion.

Preparation for Stakeholder Meeting #3

At this point in the process, participants have gathered a great deal of information about the various themes of civic participation in their community. Organizing this information into a few focused problem statements will facilitate the development of action steps in the next phase of the project. The barriers associated with each civic theme in the second meeting can serve as a basis for the problem statements.

For instance, continuing the "Volunteerism" example discussed above, the following problem statements were developed based on the assessment of strengths and weaknesses in the area of volunteerism:

- ? *Problem Statement #1:* How to make information and opportunities about volunteerism available to everyone in the community efficiently and quickly.
- ? *Problem Statement #2:* How to make volunteerism appealing to a broad range of citizens in our community, overcoming issues such as time, recognition and clarity of goals and objectives.
- ? *Problem Statement #3:* How to increase volunteerism among younger people in the community.

An Action Plan Example

Action plans are almost limitless in their variety. Below is an example of a problem statement, strategy and action steps that were included in one piloting community's plan to address the civic theme of volunteerism:

Problem Statement: How to increase volunteerism among younger people.

Strategy 1: Increase volunteerism at high school and middle school levels

Action Step 1: Research other youth volunteer programs.

Action Step 2: Engage cooperation of Board of Education and school administration.

Action Step 3: Include volunteerism in Personal Development course.

Action Step 4: Offer extra class credit for community service.

Action Step 5: Match youth skills/interest with community needs.

Stakeholder Meeting #3: Action Planning

The first two stakeholder meetings focused on defining the vision of civic participation for the community and assessing the community's civic infrastructure. The third stakeholder meeting carries the process into the area of implementation by setting priorities and planning action steps. By the end of this meeting, the participants will have developed a specific plan of action and identified those who will implement the plan. The steps suggested to move toward this goal are:

- 1. Present the action planning process:** Review the problem statements developed for each civic theme and explain the process that will be followed throughout the meeting.
- 2. Clarify problem statements, brainstorming strategies and prioritizing strategies:** Participants will divide into small groups, each of which will concentrate on one of the civic themes. These groups will begin by choosing two problem statements they judge to be most urgent. Their next step will be to brainstorm possible strategies to address each problem statement. Finally, they will select three of the brainstormed strategies for each problem statement.

3. Develop action steps and identify

selected and to define the order in which these actions need to occur. The groups will conclude by identifying the champions for each strategy – the people or organizations whose involvement will be necessary for success.

4. **Report back:** The small groups will report their conclusions to all participants.
5. **Next steps:** A fourth meeting will provide the opportunity to consider how the civic participation effort can best be sustained in order to accomplish the action plan developed. There are several alternative ways to approach this important meeting:
 - ? Bring the entire stakeholder group back together
 - ? Bring the steering committee together
 - ? Form an implementation group of volunteers
 - ? Invite input from the various champions identified who may not be participating in the Civic Participation process

The group should determine its preference for the fourth meeting, set a date and assign any tasks that need to be completed prior to the meeting, including

Preparation for Stakeholder Meeting #4

To prepare for the fourth meeting, the action plan should be compiled and distributed to stakeholders and to champions identified at the third meeting, and feedback regarding the plan should be gathered and compiled.

Stakeholder Meeting #4 Moving Forward

The fourth meeting’s purpose is to design a structure and process that will sustain the civic participation effort. The first objective is to review and edit the action plan and prioritize the strategies by selecting a limited number that could be done quickly, perhaps by leveraging current activities.

The session’s second objective is to develop a plan for implementation by addressing questions such as:

- ? What type of committee structure would be best suited to implement the plan?
- ? What staffing or resources will be needed?
- ? What will be the roles and responsibilities of the staff and committees?
- ? Who are the “champions” that will be responsible for moving the plan forward (e.g., volunteers, town officials, community organizations)? How will we maintain communications?
- ? What procedures will we follow with respect to meeting schedules,

locations, leadership, decision making, etc.?

Finally, the group should identify and schedule the immediate next steps, determine the agenda for the next meeting and decide what needs to happen prior to that meeting and who is responsible for those tasks.

AN ONGOING JOURNEY

CONCLUSION:

By the end of the Civic Participation Project, communities will have achieved a number of important objectives:

- ? They will have identified specific strategies for increasing civic participation.
- ? They will have identified action steps to implement the strategies.
- ? They will have identified individuals and/or organizations who will be the champions for each strategy.
- ? They will have developed a preliminary structure and plan of action for moving forward.

The action plans that emerge from the Civic Participation Project will be uniquely suited to each community. In some towns, for instance, the project’s goals and strategies may be incorporated into local government activities, perhaps through inclusion in the town’s

Civic Participation task forces with town committees concerned with related issues. Other communities may minimize the role of formal government structure and depend on volunteer efforts or partnerships with local nonprofit agencies.

The Civic Participation Project requires a lot of time and energy to implement, but it can deliver a significant result. Living in all our towns are people with creativity and insight, and bringing them together for this focused discussion process can energize the community and provide a wealth of good ideas.



RESOURCES

Communities that are interested in initiating a Civic Participation process have many resources at their disposal, beginning with CRCOG, which is available to provide consultation and information. Other resources that might be helpful are listed below.

For background:

Bowling Alone, by Robert Putnam. Putnam's book helps to define the issue by providing a wealth of data that documents the decline in civic participation in the United States and some ideas about why it has occurred.

The Civic Index: Measuring Your Community's Civic Health, from the National Civic League.

This book is an invaluable tool to accompany the civic participation process. It offers specific guidelines, procedures and forms for the various discussions, as well as somewhat different, but related, approaches to the meetings.

Possible resources for research, support and facilitation:

1. Capitol Region Council of Governments
241 Main Street
Hartford, CT 06106-5310
(860) 522-2217
www.crcog.org

With a membership of 29 Greater Hartford municipalities, the Capitol Region Council of Governments addresses many of the region's governmental and public challenges, working with its member municipalities to promote intermunicipal collaboration and cooperation, strengthening the City of Hartford as the core of a strong region and serving as an advocate for the region and its municipalities.

2. National Civic League
1445 Market Street, #300
Denver, CO 80202-1728
(303) 571-4343
www.ncl.org

The National Civic League is a nonprofit organization that presents the annual All-America

Awards and promotes collaboration and grass-roots problem-solving. The League provides technical assistance in program design and implementation, conducts training and offers presentations, conducts research and offers facilitation and mediation services.

3. The Study Circles Resource Center
697 Pomfret Street
P.O. Box 203
Pomfret, CT 06258
(860) 928-2616
www.studycircles.org

The Study Circles Resource Center is a nonprofit agency that promotes the use of study circles on critical social and political issues. The Center creates materials to support Study Circle discussions, distributes those materials at no charge, and provides technical assistance.

4. Connecticut Conference of Municipalities
900 Chapel Street
New Haven, CT 06510
(203) 498-3000
www.ccm-ct.org

The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities is the state's association of cities and towns, with 146 member municipalities. Its programs and services include advocacy and policy development, research and information, technical assistance and training.

5. Connecticut Policy and Economic Council
179 Allyn Street, Suite 308
Hartford, CT 06103-1421
(860) 722-2490
www.cpec.org

The Connecticut Policy and Economic Council (CPEC) is a nonprofit organization that helps citizens, neighborhood leaders, grassroots organizations and local government use information to improve the quality of life in their communities. It offers technical assistance in areas such as strategic planning, data collection, facilitation and training, project management and evaluation.

Appendices

Steering Committee Meeting 1 Agenda

Projected Meeting Outcomes

1. Understand the process of the civic participation project.
2. Understand the role of the steering committee.
3. Define the purpose of the civic participation project in each community.
4. Begin Steering committee tasks.

5:00 Introduction and Background of Project

5:15 Steering Committee Introductions

- Name and a little about yourself
- Why does the civic participation project interest you?
- What would you like to see happen as a result of this project?

5:30 Large Group Discussion: What is Civic Participation? What does that mean?

5:45 Presentation: Process and Structure of the Civic Participation Project

6:15 Small Group Work: Define Purpose and Parameters of Our Project

- Purpose
- Chair Nominees
- Project Calendar
- Project Name

7:00 Large Group Report Back

7:30 Break

7:45 Presentation: What is Stakeholder Analysis

8:00 Small Group: Begin Stakeholder Analysis

- Stakeholder Analysis
- Set next two dates for Steering Committee

8:30 Large Group Debrief of Exercise

8:45 Q and A and Next Steps

The Civic Participation Project

Steering Committee Checklist

- ☞☞ Define Project Parameters – What do we mean by Civic Participation?
- ☞☞ Stakeholder Analysis
- ☞☞ Select Project Chair(s)
- ☞☞ Set Project Calendar
- ☞☞ Project Name
- ☞☞ Select Meeting Location(s) for Stakeholder Sessions
- ☞☞ Develop Invitation and Recruitment Strategies for Stakeholders
- ☞☞ Identification and Coordination with Other Efforts
- ☞☞ Define content of civic participation assessment – what questions regarding civic participation do we want answered?
- ☞☞ Design Outreach and Data Collection Procedures
- ☞☞ Final Design of Process

Define the Purpose of Our Civic Participation Project

Appoint a facilitator and a recorder. Answer the following questions:

- o What does civic participation mean?
- o What are the most important aspects of civic participation that must be covered in this project?
- o What is our project purpose?
- o What are our project goals? What do we want to achieve?

Project Purpose:

Project Goals:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Sample Stakeholder Selection List

What name expresses the intent of this project?

Project Name:

What are the qualities of a good chair for a project such as this? What people do we know that possess those qualities? Chairperson Nominees:

Project Calendar

What are the dates of our stakeholder meetings? Have they already been set?

Use the following tool to:

- ? Identify the interests and perspectives of the broad community
- ? Identify the people who best represent those interests and perspectives
- ? Identify the person responsible for making contact with the stakeholder
- ? Set a date for when all invitations will be made and follow-up will occur

PERSPECTIVE/ INTEREST REPRESENTED	STAKEHOLDER NAME	PERSON RESPONSIBLE FOR CONTACT	BY WHEN?

Hints For Stakeholder Recruitment

- It's a good idea to know something about a stakeholder before you make contact.
- ? What is the best method of contact? Will they be more likely to participate if I make one-on-one contact?
 - ? Does this stakeholder have a past history with community planning projects that have failed? How is our effort different?
 - ? Is this a task-oriented or process-oriented type of person? How can I make them feel most comfortable about joining?

Steering Committee Meeting 2

Sample Stakeholder Invitation Letter

Dear Sally:

Over the past month, a group of citizens from our town began working together on a project to improve upon the civic participation in (insert name of town). Our thinking is that a healthy civic life in our community and active participation in governmental decision-making is a critical piece of our overall quality of life. The objectives of this project are to create a vision for healthy, vibrant civic participation, identify our strengths and weaknesses and develop action plans aimed at improving the civic participation in (insert name of town). This effort comes with the support of the Capitol Regional Council of Governments (CRCOG) and the Hartford Foundation for Community Giving. Our town is one of five in this region that have been selected to participate. If we are to be successful in our endeavor, we must involve a broad spectrum of our citizenry from all economic levels; young and old; parents, business and political leaders; and all who feel they have a stake in the future of our community.

I am writing to you because I believe you are a person who may be interested in a project to assess and improve our civic health and can contribute meaningful insights for the development of positive actions in this area. I invite you to participate in strengthening our civic practices – a fundamental characteristic of a thriving community. You will be asked to participate in a series of three meetings from October to December. We have contracted the services of the National Civic League, a 107 year-old citizen democracy organization, to assist us in the development and facilitation of these meetings.

I hope that you will consider seriously this invitation to make a difference in the future of our community. I will be in contact with you shortly to answer your questions and hopefully, enlist you as one of the stakeholders in the Civic Participation Project.

Best Regards,

Agenda

Projected Meeting Outcomes

1. Report back on stakeholder analysis and invitation process, project chair selection, project calendar, project name, meeting location, coordination with other efforts, design of outreach efforts.
2. Define content of civic participation assessment.
3. Review agenda for first stakeholder meeting.

5:00 Introduction

5:10 Review of Project Goals and Process

5:25 Steering Committee Reports and Q and A – Where is your committee on each of these areas?

?????Stakeholder invitations

?????Project chair(s)

?????Project name

?????Meeting logistics (space, food, flip charts, markers)

?????Coordination with other efforts

?????Outreach strategies

6:20 Break

6:30 Steering Committee Work: Content for the Civic Participation Assessment

1. Review the components of the Civic Index.

2. Review the themes developed during the last meeting.

?????What are the themes within civic participation your steering committee wants to explore in this project? Agree on five to seven themes that will be the basis of your civic participation assessment and action plan.

?????What forms of outreach will your project employ? How will you receive additional information from citizens who do not come to the meetings?

7:10 Large Group Report Back

7:40 Review of Stakeholder Meeting 1 Agenda

7:50 Q and A and Next Steps

Stakeholder Meeting #1

Agenda

Projected Meeting Outcomes

- ?????Understanding of the goals and process of the Civic Participation Project;
- ?????Development of a vision for healthy, vital civic participation;
- ?????Assessment of the challenges and barriers to more active civic participation

Draft Agenda

- 5:00 Dinner and/or Refreshments
- 5:30 Background on Civic Participation Project – Project Chair
- 5:40 Presentation: Why does Civic Participation Matter?
- 5:55 Structure and Process of the Civic Participation Project
- 6:10 Small Group Visioning Exercise: If our town had healthy and thriving civic participation, what would it look like? What would we see? What does civic participation at its optimal level look like?
- 6:50 Break
- 7:05 Report Back and Consolidate Vision Themes
- 7:35 Large Group Discussion: What are the barriers and challenges that keep us from reaching our vision?
- 8:10 Meeting Summary, Next Steps
- 8:30 Adjourn

Stakeholder Meeting #2

Agenda

Projected Meeting Outcomes

- ?????Validate shared vision for enhanced civic participation (carried over from last meeting). The product will be a finalized vision for civic participation.
- ?????Assess critical areas of civic participation using the National Civic League's tool, the *Civic Index*, as well as customized tools that target specific areas of interest of each town. The product of this session is qualitative data regarding the civic health of each town.

Draft Agenda

- 5:00 Dinner and/or Refreshments
- 5:30 Review of Last Meeting
- 5:35 Finalize Civic Participation Vision
- 5:50 Introduction: Civic Participation Assessment
- 6:10 Small Group: Civic Participation Assessment
- 7:00 Break
- 7:15 Large Group Report Back and Discussion
- 8:00 Key Overarching Themes
- 8:15 Meeting Summary, Next Steps

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT AND ACTION PLANNING PROCESS

1. Appoint a facilitator and recorder

Facilitator guides this brainstorming and action planning process. The recorder takes ideas and information through each step of the action planning process.

2. Defining the problem

- a. Read through each problem statement and pick two that appear to be the most pressing problems.
- b. If your group feels two of the problem statements don't describe well the situation, write another one (or two) that does.
- c. Finish this exercise in ten minutes.

3. Brainstorming solutions

Brainstorming is wide open thinking. No ideas are bad.

- a. Spend 15 minutes per problem statement (total of 30 minutes) brainstorming strategies that will solve the problem stated in each problem statement. Answer this question, what are the strategies that solve this problem? What strategies should we employ?
- b. Try not to get into very specific action steps at this point. Stay focused on broad strategies.
- c. Come up with at least five to eight per problem statement

4. Prioritizing strategies

- a. At this point you should have two lists of brainstormed strategies based on the two problem statements you selected. Go back through one of the lists of brainstormed strategies.
- b. Cluster together similar ideas, if there are any.
- c. Select the best three strategies that should be pursued to improve your area. Base your decision on the following criteria:
 - The strategy will have a significant impact on the problem
 - The strategy is doable – it's something that could actually happen.
 - The strategy holds the passion and support of the group

- d. After you have selected the three best strategies based on the above criteria, move on to your second list of strategies and do the same.
- e. Complete this step in 15 minutes for each brainstormed list for a total of 30 minutes.

Take a ten minute break!

5. Action Planning

- a. Now your group should have two sets of three strategies for each problem statement for a total of six strategies. Pick one set to work with.
- b. Brainstorm – What specific actions need to take place in order for this strategy to become a reality? Be clear and specific in stating the action steps. Take about five minutes to brainstorm.
- c. Order – what actions need to occur first? Place the action steps in the logical order they need to occur.
- d. Repeat these steps for each of your strategies.
- e. Total time for this exercise – 45 minutes.

6. Identifying Champions

None of these strategies and action steps will occur without a champion taking on the responsibility of following through. In many cases, a strategy will require the collaborative efforts of various people and organizations to meet success.

- a. Go back through each of your six strategies. Ask the group, who are the key players and organizations that must be involved in the implementation of each strategy?
- b. Who in this group is willing to write their name next to one or more of these strategies to assist in its implementation?
- c. Remember, this is a citizen participation project. We can't expect local government to take the final product of this project and implement everything for us.

Total time for this exercise – 15 minutes.

ACTION PLANNING WORKSHEETS

1. The recorder is responsible for filling out the following action planning worksheets.
2. Please use complete sentences that fully explain your strategy, action steps and champions. Word your sentences as if someone who has no prior knowledge of the work we are doing would understand what you have written.

Leave all Action Planning Worksheets on your table at the end of the evening.

Name of Civic Theme: _____

Problem Statement #1: _____

Strategy 1: _____

Action Step:

Action Step:

Action Step:

Action Step:

Action Step:

Who are the Champions of this strategy? _____

Strategy 2: _____

Action Step:

Action Step:

Action Step:

Action Step:

Action Step:

Stakeholder Meeting #4

Agenda

Meeting Objectives

????Review and edit the Civic Action Plan

????Develop Implementation Plan

6:00 Review of agenda

6:10 Review of last three meetings and accomplishments

6:20 Review and edit the Civic Action Plan
????Develop criteria for and prioritize action plan strategies
????Review and adapt strategies and action steps
????Prioritize key strategies
????Outline content of planning document

7:30 Develop Implementation Plan
????Implementation structure/committee – Do we need one?
????Staffing
????Roles and responsibilities of staff and committee
????Procedures – when will we meet and how will we make decisions?

8:15 Next steps
????What else needs to be done on the Action Plan and how will it be done?
????What will be the first actions of our group? What is the agenda of our first meeting?
????What needs to happen between now and our next meeting?

8:30 Adjourn

Who are the champions of this strategy? _____

Strategy 3: _____

Action Step:

Action Step:

Action Step:

Action Step:

Action Step:

Who are the Champions of this strategy? _____

(These steps would be repeated for other problem statements.)

Small Group Work

1. Please participate in the group that you worked with throughout the assessment and planning meetings.
2. Appoint a facilitator and a recorder.
3. **Clarify the Strategies** – Are all of the strategies and action steps clearly stated? If not, what is missing?
4. **Identify Linkages** - Which of the strategies is already being pursued in some fashion by the town, another organization or community-based project? If there are some that fall within this category, answer these questions:
 - Is the goal of this strategy already being met? Is it being done in the way that participants in this project intended?
 - Can this effort help to support, improve and bolster the efforts already underway?
 - How can we link with the town or organizations that are working in this area?
5. **Prioritize the Strategies and Action steps** – Use the following criteria to decide which strategies and action steps should be pursued first:
 - What are the easy wins?
 - Which action steps are doable and realistic?
 - Which action steps will have a major impact on the civic issue?
 - Which action steps hold the passion of the group?
6. **Identify Champions** – who are the lead champions for each strategy? Who will get the ball rolling?
7. Which strategies and action steps should be pursued first? Which strategies and action steps need further development?