

Chapter 8

Engaging Community

Facilitator Notes

Chapter 8 on *Engaging Community* explores the essential role of architecture professionals in fostering relationships with the broader public (rather than the other chapters which focus on internal practices), with a particular emphasis on inclusion, listening, and shared power. This chapter supports participants in examining how design can serve diverse communities and how architectural practice can be shaped by the people it impacts most.

What this guide includes:

- A statement of the importance of building authentic, long-term relationships with communities.
- Tools and practices for inclusive community engagement.
- Strategies for co-creation, shared authorship, and equitable project development.
- Reflection on power dynamics, trust-building, and social responsibility.
- Sample questions, case studies, and ethical considerations.

Use this outline to:

- Expand the definition of “client” to include communities and stakeholders.
- Help you practice inclusive, participatory design processes.
- Understand how equity, cultural humility, and service intersect in architectural work.
- Build a culture of listening, learning, and accountability in design.

Suggested Pre-Read:

- To maximize engagement and discussion, participants should read the corresponding chapters one page, [Executive Summary](#).

Corresponding Learning

Attendees will be able to:

- Describe community engagement and its importance in promoting equity, inclusion, and justice in architectural practice.
- Explore the roles architects can play in engaging communities—as professionals, citizens, and advocates—and identify opportunities for involvement.
- Name and apply principles of effective, continuous engagement, including tools and strategies that support co-creation and accessible communication.
- Evaluate their own and their firm’s current engagement practices, identifying strengths, gaps, and opportunities for growth.
- Develop goals to enhance community engagement efforts and commit to a follow-up or accountability strategy.

SLIDE 2 ENGAGING COMMUNITY

- As community needs encompass broad concerns, such as social justice and resiliency, architects will do well to learn, build trust, and adopt solutions created in partnership with those communities. By practicing greater equity, the profession increases its value to society as well as its visibility among potential partners and future practitioners.
- This guide explains the fundamental principles and attributes of community engagement and proposes specific methods and guidance for involving community members in equitable, inclusive, and just design processes, decision making, and outcomes.

Notes

1. **What comes to mind when you hear "community engagement"?**
 2. **Who are your projects designed for—and who gets to decide?**
 3. **Set expectations for rules of engagement.**
-

SLIDE 3 WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

- The essence of community engagement is the inclusion of divergent voices— professionals, stakeholders, and end users—to arrive at consensus about project goals and characteristics, with a positive outcome for all.
- Architectural professional can engage in three forms of community engagement:
 - Individual practitioners can engage in their communities as informed and involved citizens.
 - An architect can lead or facilitate engagement as a professional, connecting the client to the community and the community to the project. In some cases, the community might be the client.
 - Architects can model engaged and equitable practices as they consider their impact on society.

Notes

1. **Examples of ways that professionals can engage as citizens include:**
 - **Volunteering for a non-profit and community planning efforts.**
 - **Appearing at public hearings, identifying as an architect/designer.**
 - **Running for public office.**
 - **Serving as a local, state or federal organizer, advocate, or activist.**

SLIDE 4 WHY ENGAGEMENT MATTERS

- Communities are deeply affected by architectural decisions yet are often excluded from the process. When community engagement focuses on values of equity, inclusiveness, and justice, the community and architecture alike reap the benefits.
- Authentic engagement builds trust, surfaces insight, improves project outcomes, and builds credibility.
- When architects participate in outreach organizations or offer equity-centered services, the profession also becomes more visible, potentially attracting a new generation of architects and thereby enhancing diversity in the profession in the long term.
- As underscored in the AIA Code of Ethics, architects have a responsibility to people and the planet.

Notes

1. **Think of a time when your work involved public input—what went well? What was missing?**
 2. **What are different ways architects engage with communities? How might your role shift if you thought of yourself as a facilitator of community knowledge?**
-

SLIDE 5 ENGAGEMENT IS A PRACTICE, NOT AN EVENT

Effective engagement is continuous—not a single meeting or design charrette.

- Use ongoing dialogue, not one-time feedback loops.
- Build in space for community voice early and often.
- Clarify who holds decision-making power at each stage.
- Compensate community members for their time and expertise when appropriate.

Notes

1. **Regardless of the cultural characteristics, designers who have sustained interactions with communities rather than superficial, brief interchanges are more likely to be successful.**
 2. **Think about a project that involved community engagement. How were the community members brought into the process? Were they left out?**
-

SLIDE 6 TOOLS FOR INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT

Use practices that invite co-creation:

- Listening sessions, storytelling, and design games
- Visual tools that don't rely on technical jargon
- Translators, interpreters, and accessibility services
- Flexible hours and childcare support

Notes

1. **Share any tools or methods your team uses to connect with communities.**
2. **Consider the needs of community members beyond those already engaged.**

SLIDE 7 WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Notes

1. Review each example of 'What good looks like'. Make a check mark next to practices that you can find in your firm or organization, a question mark for those where you are not sure, and a minus for those that are missing.
 2. What areas are strong, which are you not sure about, and which areas are weak?
 3. Ask for volunteers to share examples.
 4. What can you do to influence change?
-

SLIDE 8 INDIVIDUAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIONS

- Recognize the public as co-creators of design outcomes. They bring expertise about the community and its history. Consider opportunities to benefit the local economy in the short and long term.
- Be aware of how you might be viewed by the community as an outsider. Look for opportunities to be active in the community outside of work. Share more about how architects work.
- Do your homework: research communities, connect with a cross section of the community, and understand the impact of past projects or interactions. Meet past harms or reasons for distrust with curiosity, empathy, and interest. Understand community culture and communication styles and practice listening and intercultural competence.

Notes

1. What are some common obstacles you've seen in engagement processes?
2. What does the phrase "Nothing about us without us" suggest?
What does it aim to achieve, and what does it push back against?

SLIDE 9 FIRM COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIONS

- Create opportunities to engage the community in timelines and project plans. Building meaningful relationships takes time.
- Include people who are familiar with the community's history and culture before and during the design process.
- Conduct post-occupancy evaluations to ensure users' needs have been met.
- Value staff who demonstrate effective and inclusive community engagement. Foster a workplace culture where staff engaged in their own communities are acknowledged and rewarded.

Notes

1. How is community engagement supported or recognized within your team?
 2. At what points does your firm solicit community participation?
 3. How do you gather post-occupancy information from users?
-

SLIDE 10 CONSIDER SCENARIOS & REFLECTIONS**Notes**

1. Select a scenario from the chapter that you feel will resonate with the group. Ask a volunteer to read it aloud. Discuss the discussion prompts in small groups and share with the full group.
-

SLIDE 11 NOW WHAT?

- What's one SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, timebound) goal you can set to improve how you engage with the communities you serve?

Notes

1. Give everyone the option to share.
2. Suggest they check in with a peer or accountability partner one month later.
3. Note that there are many more ideas for action and additional scenarios in the full chapter.
4. If you have specific resources, committees, or additional worksheets, you can promote those here.