



# The Guides for Equitable Practice: Chapter 8





# Guides for Equitable Practice: 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.



# 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.
- Architects can engage in three forms of community engagement:
  - Individual architects can engage in their communities as informed and involved citizens
  - An architect can lead or facilitate engagement as a professional
  - Architects can model engaged and equitable practices as they consider their impact on society



# Why engagement matters

Communities are deeply affected by architectural decisions, yet often excluded.

Authentic engagement builds trust, insight, credibility.

Promotes visibility and diversity of the profession.

AIA Code of Ethics underscores a responsibility to people and the planet.



# Engagement is a practice, not an event

*Effective engagement is continuous*



**USE ONGOING DIALOGUE**



**INCLUDE COMMUNITY VOICE EARLY**



**CLARIFY DECISION-MAKING ROLES**



**COMPENSATE COMMUNITY EXPERTISE**



# 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



# 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 that you are not sure
- A minus for those that are missing.

GUIDE 8\* ENGAGING COMMUNITY

WHAT DOES GOOD LOOK LIKE?

## We are successful in community engagement when...

### CONNECTION

the project process and result fully engage the intended users

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there is mutual learning, growth, and respect between the architect and the community

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architects listen to the visions of the community and use their expertise to give them shape

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communities are fully invested in and take ownership of the process and project

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past and present inequities are corrected by planning and designing future spaces and places

### TRUST

the architect and the community respect each other's knowledge

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the architect is brought into the community for advice

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there are project team members from the same culture as the community, and their cultural expertise is valued

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architects act as listeners, as well as presenters and facilitators, during community events

### ALIGNMENT

the resulting project accommodates and is accessible and safe for all in the community

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the architect genuinely understands the users' needs and wants and reflects them in the ultimate design

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the community appreciates and maintains the resulting facilities

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equity is a key factor in decision-making, leading to the best-use, best-value, and high-quality end product

### POWER

design teams seek out and listen to many voices in the community, especially those with less power and privilege

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architects work to make their expertise and information meaningful and understandable

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power, responsibility, and accountability are shared

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architects are sensitive to and incorporate design elements and symbols offered by the community, not those solely based on their own interpretation, which may not be as fully informed

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the power of space and place is used to challenge discrimination and promote equity in all forms



# Individual community engagement actions

Recognize public as co-authors with expertise.

Consider local economic benefits.

Be active in community beyond work, share what architects do.

Understand the historical context including past harms or reasons for mistrust.





# Firm community engagement actions

- Build multiple engagement opportunities into timelines.
- Involve cultural historians in design development.
- Conduct post-occupancy evaluations.
- Foster a workplace culture that recognizes engaged staff and talented community facilitators.



## Consider

### LISTENING AND BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

The city had hired a firm and had to let them go, so the project went on hold as a result. They had already torn down the old building, so the community was upset. When we were brought on board, the community had some distrust with the city government. And since they didn't know us, we had to earn their trust. We were required to hold three or four community engagement sessions. The community came with some suspicion. We had a listening session, and boy, they had a lot to say.

We came back after a few weeks with some initial designs, and I thought for sure there would be some healthy back-and-forth about the design. We presented, and the reaction was to complain about what the city had done previously. They were still focused on the fact that they didn't have a building for their community. We came back for a third meeting, with some advanced designs, and, again, the significant part of the conversation was about how the city had done the community wrong. It took me a while to realize that the community simply needed to vent, to get it out of their system. By the fourth meeting, they started to see that we were representing their interests. It was pointed out to me that we architects need to know what the community is looking for. We even added a fifth meeting, so they could interact with us. That was a critical moment, when you could feel the trust building between us and the community. As a result, the project turned out to be that much better because of the community's input.

—Architect/Designer, African American, Male, 50s

# Consider scenarios & reflections

Read, discuss in small groups, and share insights



## Now what?

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