



January 2018

Useful Community Development... quick notes

This Month: Ideas for Reaching New Constituencies, Latest Articles and Reports We Liked, Sitemap Improvements To Help You Find Pertinent Pages

Visit us and explore at <https://www.useful-community-development.org>.



Above: Market in Luzern, Switzerland. Follow this and a few other such photos through our [Sitemap](#) for a tiny lesson on placemaking.

New Ways of Reaching People Who Deserve a Say

Many of you have told us that your old ways of involving people in community planning and "community doing" just don't work any more. Sometimes it's the "how" that baffles you, but more often, you're concerned about "who." In most communities, whole blocks of people stay away from your scripted meetings.

We agree that your results will be more representative and long-lasting if you engage a broader spectrum of people. If you have the same 15 or 20 people coming to civic-minded meetings all the time, and it takes tremendous effort to get input from others, let's tackle how to tap into the mindset of a much more varied range of people.

Let's dispense with "how" first. If you want the "who" to be more representative so that you have solutions that are realistic and likely to receive enough support to be implemented, you may have to be much more flexible about "how" also.

Experiment with techniques including:

- **Social media beyond what you are already doing, especially adding short online polls,**
- **Fast conversations with people where they go anyway, such as the playground, the grocery store, or popular shopping areas, and**
- **Active listening instead of developing quantitative data from pre-developed questionnaires and surveys.**

This alternative approach rests on inroads into networks of people, both formal organized groups and especially informal conversations where people gather. If you listen comprehensively throughout your community, you will deepen your significance by bringing in new voices. You'll also find that the people in one acquaintance network lead to other clusters, making your outreach more robust.

Where do you look for these groups and networks that would be under-represented in your community engagement efforts otherwise? Below we're sharing our long list of examples, which can stimulate you to think of the categories that will work in your own community.

- **Civic and service groups, such as Rotary and other service organizations, "good government" types of groups, civic leadership**
- **Business groups, including professional associations, labor unions, business associations for particular district or neighborhoods, large-scale business groups, and employee groups**

OK, OK, you already thought of those. But what about:

- **"Same place same time" folks, who tend to get to know one another, such as gym patrons, laundromat customers, after-school hangouts, food pantry customers, season ticket holders, barbershop customers, apartment dwellers coming home from work, riders of the 92 bus, coffee shop patrons, bar regulars, vendors at a weekly farmers market or monthly flea market or hobby show, skateboarders at a popular location, playground moms**
- **Clients of various non-profits, especially those serving racial and ethnic minorities, lower-income populations, seniors, disability groups**
- **Schools, including students from about 4th grade up, parents, teachers, and boosters and grandparents who attend school plays and sports**
- **Churches and religious groups**
- **Youth organizations, including Scouts, Boys and Girls Clubs, and others**
- **Sports leagues for all ages**
- **Neighborhood associations, or those who live on the same rural road, or in the same subdivision, manufactured home park, or migrant camp**

- **Classes, especially those likely to develop social bonds, such as vocational, ESL (English as a second language), or yoga classes**
- **Alumni associations, including especially sororities and fraternities**
- **People who don't miss a certain type of concert or a first Friday art walk**

Note that many suggestions don't involve a formal, organized group. They tap places people congregate, where they may share information with one another when motivated, and where you can talk with several people at one time to get a feel for how folks regard an issue, or the future of your community. Compromising a bit on methods can work for you, especially if your turnout is discouraging when you invite everyone to a traditional public meeting.

If you really need specific information from a survey, try asking people to stop in the grocery store or church service on their way out. Vary your "where" if you must have a data output.

Yes, you give up a lot if you settle for informal conversations without benefit of a stack of poster boards. It takes some work to scope out these informal opportunities. But you might gain a whole new perspective.

Our Sitemap Now More User-Friendly

We've been wanting to give you a way to isolate all the articles pertaining to rural areas, or suburbs, or distressed neighborhoods, for example. This month we finished the work of adding PDF files to our Sitemap to allow you to look at or download links to pages for your type of interest.

For instance, our navigation places rural housing under Housing, rural economic development under Economic Development, and rural zoning under Zoning. But you might be interested in all things rural. The new tables are for you.

For your convenience, here are the direct links to those files for:

- [Neighborhoods](#)

New Reports, Articles for You

- The President's Interagency Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity describes its approach in this excellent [article on opioid addiction](#), with particular emphasis on its impacts on rural populations.
- We were intrigued with an [article from Strong Towns](#) about how young parents want to stay in their walkable, mixed-use urban neighborhoods even after they become parents, but they are encountering a lack of affordable family-style housing, parks, and quality neighborhood schools.
- The Municipal Research and Service Center in the state of Washington has compiled a terrific [toolkit on homelessness and related housing issues](#), providing

- [Distressed neighborhoods](#)
 - [Rural interest](#)
 - [Suburban interest](#)
 - [Business districts](#)
 - [Local government officials interest](#)
 - [International interest](#)
 - [Lower income population interest](#)
 - [Regional interest](#)
- many helpful examples. We added this one to our page on [homelessness](#) too.
- The Urban Institute provides a convincing paper on [why more government housing assistance, not less, is needed](#). This provided a nice addition to our [government housing assistance](#) page.

New Website Content This Month: This month we wrote fairly detailed answers to readers' questions on these topics: [code enforcement officers' right to be in back yard](#); [whether very large cities are better](#); [meaning of the planning term ETJ](#), [role of community development organizations in conflict resolution](#), [zoning ordinance saying that zoning cannot interfere with deed restrictions](#); and [rezoning directly conflicting with deed restriction](#).

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