



CITY OF
Vancouver
WASHINGTON

Beyond Board: Creating Playful Public Engagement Experiences

Melody Burton

Senior Communications Specialist
Vancouver Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services
WRPA Conference | May 23, 2024

Our Plan



Hello

Finding out
who's here



Rules

Agreeing on
how we play



Equipment

Getting to know
the tools



Play

Learning to
play together



Melody Burton (she/her)

A little about me...

- 5 years in parks and recreation, 15+ years in non-profit communications
- Enjoy reading, baking, hiking, watching UK TV shows and trying to be a gardener
- On the weekend I'm probably going to see live music or a comedy show
- I can't let a day pass without doing my NYT word puzzles



Mentimeter Response

- What's one word that sums up your experiences with community engagement?



Getting to Know Each Other

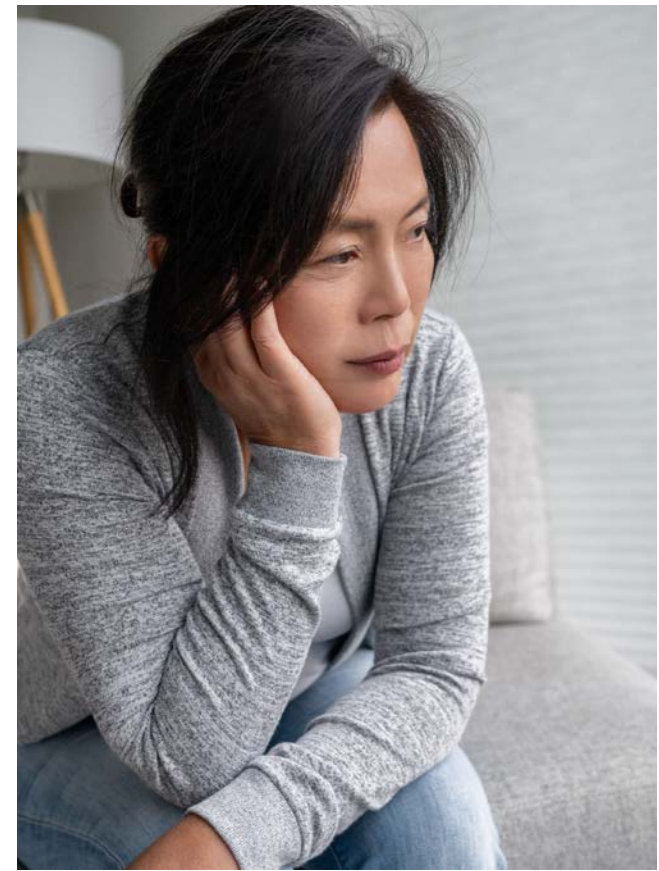
Impromptu Networking

- Why did you choose to attend this session?
- What do you want to learn from AND offer to the other attendees of this session?



Why this Work Matters

- Research tells us that Americans are disconnected and feel like their voices are not heard
- Political polarization and isolation impacts due to the pandemic make it more challenging to work together on shared problems
- Local governments are key conveners in addressing society's most pressing issues



Why our Approach Matters

- Playful approaches invite people to engage in a creative process
- Playful approaches focus on collaborative sharing and listening
- Playful approaches simplify concepts and remove barriers to participation
- Playful approaches welcome nuance



Words of Wisdom

Quotes to guide public engagement

“I’m talking to you, so right now you are the most important person to me.

Our conversation is the most important thing to me right now.”

-Fred Rogers



Words of Wisdom

Quotes to guide public engagement

“These people are members of the community that care about where they live.

So, what I hear when I’m being yelled at is people caring loudly at me.”

-Leslie Knope



Mentimeter Response

- What is your role in community engagement at your organization?



The Rules

Foundations of public engagement

Role of community members

- Talk to one another
- Share ideas and work together
- Follow the code of conduct

Staff and elected officials

- Ask the right questions
- Listen and learn
- Serve as the group memory



The Rules

Foundations of public engagement

In true public engagement, community members have the opportunity to influence a decision and/or affect an outcome.

Public engagement IS NOT:

- ✘ Convincing the public to.../Selling the public on...
- ✘ Answering questions in front of a room
- ✘ A process where staff/electeds control the outcome
- ✘ Checking a box because it's required



The Rules

Differences between communications and public engagement



Communications

Provide the public with information and possibly a call to action



Public Engagement

Invite the community to influence, impact or change a decision, initiative or project



The Rules

Differences between communications and public engagement

Communications

- Can be passive, active or both
- Usually a monologue
- Focus on messaging, not listening
- Is one part of a public engagement process
- Not usually collaborative

Public Engagement

- Active, never passive
- Dialogue, not monologue
- Focused on listening and incorporating feedback
- Requires follow up
- Built on relationships





Engagement Board Check In

What tools does your agency use to engage the public?



The Equipment

What we need for public engagement

Determining a public engagement process

1. Is there an opportunity for community members to influence, a decision/affect an outcome?



The Equipment

What we need for public engagement

Determining a public engagement process

1. Is there an opportunity for community members to influence, a decision/affect an outcome?
2. What else is going on that is impacting or influencing?



The Equipment

What we need for public engagement

Determining a public engagement process

1. Is there an opportunity for community members to influence, a decision/affect an outcome?
2. What else is going on that is impacting or influencing?
3. Who needs to provide input to inform your engagement process?



The Equipment

What we need for public engagement

Determining a public engagement process

1. Is there an opportunity for community members to influence, a decision/affect an outcome?
2. What else is going on that is impacting or influencing?
3. Who needs to provide input to inform your engagement process?
4. Do you have the resources?



The Equipment

What we need for public engagement

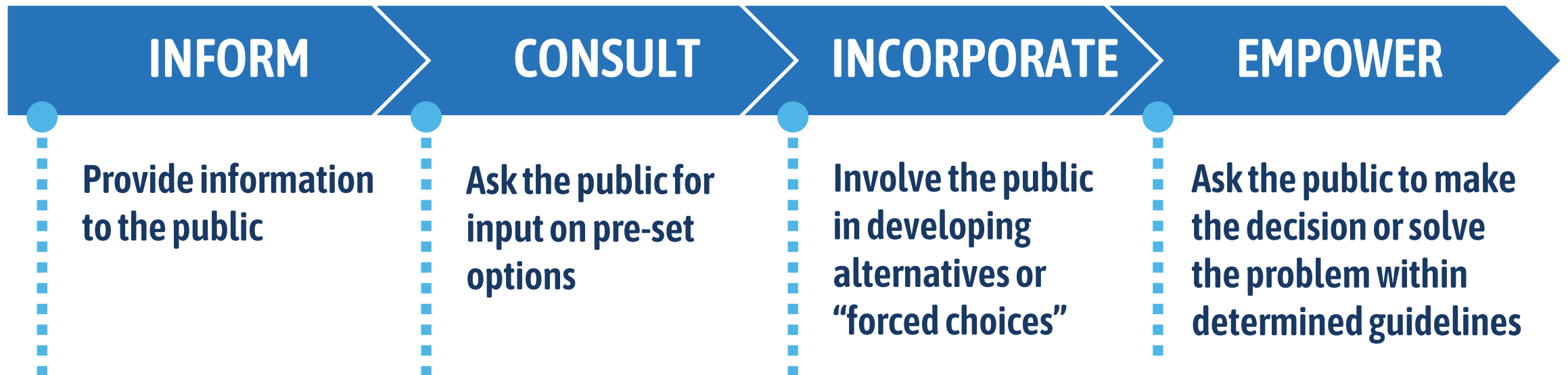
Determining a public engagement process

1. Is there an opportunity for community members to influence, a decision/affect an outcome?
2. What else is going on that is impacting or influencing?
3. Who needs to provide input to inform your engagement process?
4. Do you have the resources?
5. Are the decision makers on board?



The Equipment

Public Engagement Spectrum



Public engagement is unique to each project. Let your public engagement process guide where you fall on the public engagement spectrum.



Mentimeter Quiz

What is the first step in determining a public engagement process?

- Setting a budget and timeline
- Getting to know your audience
- Identifying an opportunity for public influence



Mentimeter Quiz

Which of the following **is not** part of the public engagement spectrum?

- Consult
- Inform
- Debate
- Empower
- Incorporate



Ways to Play

Prioritizing and Budgeting

- Give attendees each a set amount of play money to spend on your project
- Price each priority item simply, weighted toward actual cost or impact
- Allow people to work together, pooling resources and negotiating deals
- Reflect on the final priority list and the negotiations



Mentimeter 100 Points

What are your favorite things about WRPA?























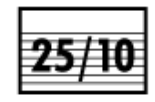











- Connecting with colleagues and networking
- Learning new things at educational sessions
- Having fun and exploring a new city during the socials
- Seeing new products at the exhibit hall
- Getting out of town and staying at a hotel



Ways to Play

Liberating Structures

- Engage everyone at public meetings through Liberating Structures activities
- 33 methods to replace or complement traditional meeting practices
- Accessible to most experiences and fosters lively participation in groups of many sizes
- Every detail is outlined



















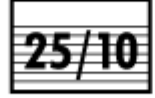











LS Menu 	Wicked questions 	What ³ debrief 	Min specs 	Heard, seen respected 	What I need from you 	Integrated autonomy 
Design elements 	Appreciative interviews 	Discovery and action dialog 	Improv prototyping 	Drawing together 	Open space 	Critical uncertainties 
1-2-4-All 	TRIZ 	Shift & share 	Helping heuristics 	Design storyboards 	Generative relationships 	Ecocycle 
Impromptu networking 	15% solutions 	25 : 10 crowdsourcing 	Conversation café 	Celebrity interview 	Agree/certainty matrix 	Panarchy 
9-whys 	Troika consulting 	Wise crowds 	User experience fishbowl 	Social network webbing 	Simple ethnography 	Purpose to practice 



Ways to Play

Liberating Structures

- Our meeting started using the “Impromptu Networking” Liberating Structure
- 1-2-4-All
- Also great for internal team building, problem solving and strategic planning

LS Menu 	Wicked questions 	What³ debrief 	Min specs 	Heard, seen respected 	What I need from you 	Integrated autonomy 
Design elements 	Appreciative interviews 	Discovery and action dialog 	Improv prototyping 	Drawing together 	Open space 	Critical uncertainties 
1-2-4-All 	TRIZ 	Shift & share 	Helping heuristics 	Design storyboards 	Generative relationships 	Ecocycle 
Impromptu networking 	15% solutions 	25 : 10 crowdsourcing 	Conversation café 	Celebrity interview 	Agree/certainty matrix 	Panarchy 
9-whys 	Troika consulting 	Wise crowds 	User experience fishbowl 	Social network webbing 	Simple ethnography 	Purpose to practice 



Ways to Play

Trivia Night

- Plan a trivia night at a local bar, restaurant, park or community center
- Create questions that will inform people on the project topic or goal, be sure there's a mix of difficulty level
- During breaks, provide opportunity for project feedback
- Award project focused prizes
- Remember to have fun



Ways to Play

Build It, SimCity Style

- Make traditional charrette or community mapping activity more engaging with building blocks, boxes or Lego
- Set guidelines for what is mandatory and what is allowed
- Attendees work together to build the space
- Throw in twists that require groups to rethink and find solutions together



Ways to Play

Loteria

- Design loteria cards for key amenities or program features that you want to discuss
- Create randomized loteria boards that people will use to play the game
- Place the cards in an order that tells a story
- Pause between cards to ask questions, clarify responses
- Offer traditional loteria prizes
- Great activity for all ages and multilingual groups





Engagement Board Check In

Have you been part of any creative and/or playful public engagement experiences?



Final Thoughts

Becoming a public engagement champion

Leadership is a quality, not a position or job

- Management = operations, budgets, tactics, personnel
- Leadership = mission, vision, values, improvement, stakeholders

Leadership is for people at all levels, not just those at the top. **Public engagement is leadership work.**





Thank You!

Let's Connect

- melody.burton@cityofvancouver.us
- LinkedIn [@melody-s-burton](#)
- Instagram [@goplayvancouver](#)

