

**Atlanta
Community
Engagement
Playbook**

About

Atlanta is one of the fastest growing cities in the country with unprecedented growth, new developments such as the Atlanta Beltline, the Mercedes-Benz Stadium, the future re-development of Turner Field, and sweeping changes occurring throughout many Atlanta neighborhoods. In this environment, civic engagement is more important than ever. This playbook was designed through a collaborative process with stakeholders across Westside neighborhoods—where new plans and changes are currently underfoot—to facilitate constructive engagement and to mobilize community-led development and change.

Over an 18-month community led research and design process, residents of Atlanta’s Westside neighborhoods interviewed their neighbors, community associations, City department staff, and service providers about what works and what doesn’t in civic engagement. Together, we identified a set of guiding principles and concrete plays that will facilitate genuine and inclusive engagement for all stakeholders of Atlanta.

The City of Atlanta and its community partners are committed to engaging residents, businesses, and organizations, to shape the city to be the best it can be. This playbook includes approaches to community engagement that are constructive, sustainable, collaborative, holistic, creative, and open. The goal is to offer community associations and service providers a set of actionable practices to achieve greater levels of quality engagement. Because neighborhood-led organizing has long been at the forefront of making change in Atlanta, from the civil rights movement through to today, this playbook is designed as a working resource—with action checklists, guides, and case studies—to support community leadership and participation in engagement processes. This resource extends to municipal agencies and service providers who have a responsibility to meet communities where they are and build sustainable partnerships through engagement.

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How To Use This Playbook

This playbook is designed for those with a shared interest in building successful engagement processes and reaching higher levels of community engagement. Higher levels of engagement mean that residents own and take leadership over civic change, rather than just observing or even providing feedback.

Strong engagement is built on dialogue with a natural push and pull. This playbook has been designed to mirror that constructive process. It is meant to help two broad categories of groups—service providers and community associations—lead successful and collaborative engagements. It is essentially two playbooks—one for service providers and one for community associations—with plays and principles that complement, build off of, and—at times—change direction from one another. This mirrors the constructive process of good engagement work.

While our expectation is that organizations will benefit most from this playbook—from local churches and neighborhood associations to municipal agencies and public-private collaborations—we encourage individual residents to review the plays to help strengthen and build local community associations and to make sure

service providers are following through on their commitments to meaningful local engagement.

As you look through the plays described here, keep in mind that not every play is relevant for every project. The playbook is more like a collection of key ingredients than a recipe. Different plays will be needed depending on the work that needs to be done, the stakeholders involved, available time and resources, and the needs of the community.

This playbook includes the following sets of material for both community organizations and service providers:

- » **Principles** designed to guide how plays should be implemented. These principles were developed with residents, municipal representatives, and other service providers.
- » **Plays** for community organizations and service providers to direct engagement work. The plays are arranged in six essential areas of activity.
- » **Checklists** for each play to provide examples that them easy to implement.
- » **Action Guides** with more thorough details on a specific task or topic within a play.

As you move through the playbook, you will find visual icons corresponding to specific principles next to the plays that feature these principles. This will help you select plays to target principles that you think you should follow in a specific engagement.

Additional content, including action guides and case studies of actual projects that utilized these principles and plays, are available on-line at:

<http://ourcommunity.is/engaged>

Key Terms

Community: A group of people that may or may not be spatially connected, but who share common interests, concerns, and/or identities.

Community Association: Community associations include organizations with democratic governance structures that work on issues of broad community impact and have open membership policies. Because they are officially connected to the Neighborhood Planning Unit (NPU) process, the Atlanta neighborhood associations are the target community group for this playbook. However, we recognize that community groups that do engagement work may not be tied to a specific neighborhood, and have designed this playbook with these community associations in mind as well.

Engagements: Engagements are processes, projects, or ongoing practices that bring stakeholders together to dialogue, debate, and build consensus around issues and plans that impact their lives. Implicit in the use of “engagement” throughout this playbook is the shared understanding that we are reaching for high levels of engagement—where the stakeholders most impacted by a particular change take ownership and leadership over the process of making change.

Issue: Issues bring problems together, are solvable, and can be organized around. For example homelessness is a problem, but a project to develop affordable housing through a community land trust is an issue.

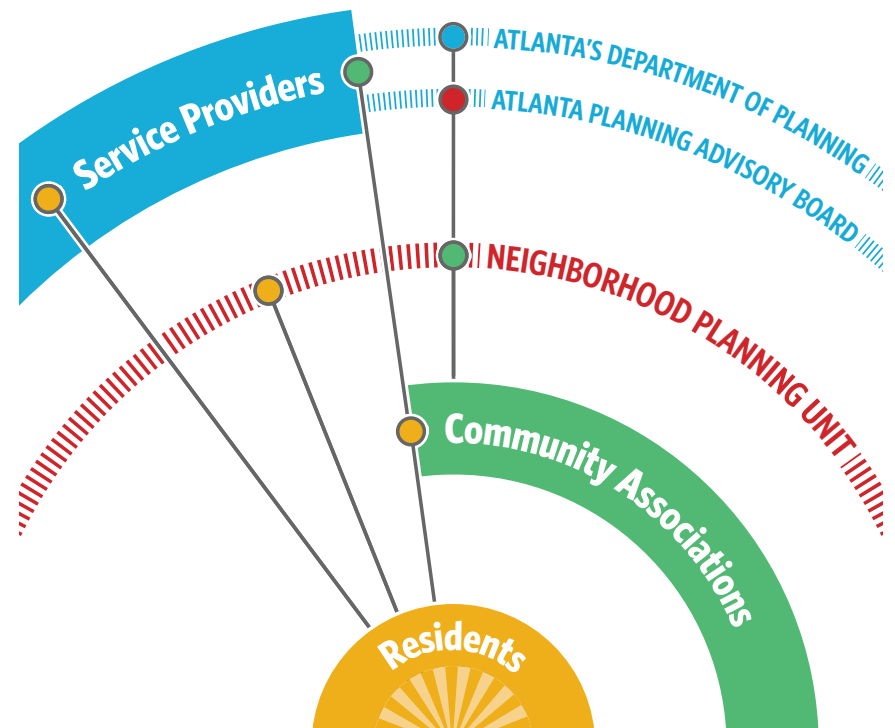
Residents: People who live in a specific geographic area.

Service Provider: Service providers refer to all public and private organizations, agencies, departments, and businesses that provide services to community members. This includes all city, county, and state departments, private foundations, and area colleges and universities.

Stakeholder: Any individual or group that will be affected by, or can affect, the outcome of a particular engagement process or the ongoing work of an organization or entity.

Civic Engagement in Atlanta

The plays have been created in recognition of the planning process in the City of Atlanta, where community associations take on issues of collective importance, make recommendations to the NPU, who then votes and sends decisions on to the Atlanta City Council, the Mayor’s Office, or the appropriate advisory committee. We have outlined these processes here, but this playbook is not meant as a guide to navigating official processes: it is a guide for facilitating constructive interaction between groups of residents and any organization—public or private—working on behalf of those residents.



2 Plays for Community Associations

PRINCIPLES



Act Constructively: Create a community-led vision for change; develop plans for achieving short-term and long-term goals and act on them; assess your context and capacities; build relationships and locate partners that will help you expand your reach.



Build Collectively: Create an inviting and open governance structure, platform, and vision that community members will rally around; work together with other groups to reach common goals; share power; work intentionally to bridge divides.



Work Creatively: Be creative in your approach; weave elements of play, fun, culture, and humor into your practices; experiment with new and surprising methods to reach people and address the issues that matter to you.

Get Organized

BRING PEOPLE IN
KNOW YOUR COMMUNITY
FOCUS ON ISSUES
MAKE A PLAN
GET PEOPLE OUT
TALK IT UP

Share your Story

IN YOUR WORDS
HOST EVENTS
NARRATE TOGETHER
COLLECT DATA
APPLY YOUR SKILLS
INCLUDE EVERYONE

Step up

TAKE THE LEAD
STAY ENERGIZED
LEARN AND GROW
OWN THE RESULTS
ASK FOR SUPPORT
MAKE IT LAST

Get Organized

BRING PEOPLE IN

KNOW YOUR COMMUNITY

FOCUS ON ISSUES

MAKE A PLAN

GET PEOPLE OUT

TALK IT UP

These plays have been adapted from best practices in community organizing. Community organizing practices help you **build collective power to identify and solve shared issues**. They enable you to create a place where community members come together to get results.



BRING PEOPLE IN

Recruit new members and volunteers to build your strength and to engage as a more powerful collective. Try to include membership recruitment and leadership development in every aspect of your work.

- Set up one on one conversations with people you want to bring in
- Understand common community concerns and follow a script for explaining how working with your group will help people to address them
- Keep in mind why residents join groups and plan conversations accordingly.
They join to:
 - Align with the cause
 - Resolve an issue that can either benefit or harm them
 - Achieve results
 - Be around other people with shared values and vision
 - Develop new skills
 - Work with people they look up to and trust

 *Action Guide: Recruiting New Members*



KNOW YOUR COMMUNITY

Before identifying issues or making specific plans, you must understand the setting, people, organizations, and resources that are connected to your work. Conduct an analysis of your community. Determine the issues that matter to people and the assets already present that can be called on to address those issues.

- What problems have been identified by our members/volunteers?
- How are decisions made?
- Who are the key decisions makers?
- What progress, if any, has already been made on specific issues?
- Who are the main community leaders and what is their reach?
- What resources exist and how are they used?
- Who has political clout and how are they connected to you?
- How have the issues that the community cares the most about been addressed in the past?



FOCUS ON ISSUES

Work with issues instead of problems. Issues bring problems together into concrete areas of focus; issues are solvable and can be organized around. Focus on one issue at a time and bring your entire network together to identify and select issues that are important to everyone.

- When deciding on an issue, can it:
- Help you recruit new members and develop leaders?
 - Result in real improvements in people's lives?
 - Result in improvements that are deeply and widely felt?
 - Bring people together (as opposed to dividing them)?
 - Be easily explained to the public?
 - Help you raise money or bring in additional resources?
 - Directly connect with your overall vision and values?



MAKE A PLAN

Create a plan for achieving your goals. Good plans cover all the necessary steps to complete a project and are based on an awareness of context. Your plan should utilize the relationships, networks, and people that will ensure the best results. For instance, if you want to present new policy to City Council, your plan should address who you will need to involve and how you will get their help.

- Your plan should include:
- A list of measurable goals
 - Resources, including funding, you have for the project
 - Members, allies, and those who may oppose you
 - An action plan, including a time-line

Action Guide: Creating an Action Plan



GET PEOPLE OUT

Ask your community and Atlanta residents at large to support your work. While many members of your community may not be aware of the issue at hand, they might be willing to publicly support you if you educate them on the issue and put together a set of achievable and clear asks.

- Go to people where they are: in the park or the grocery store
- Attend or organize social events: a block party, an arts event, or a concert
- Be prepared to quickly educate public audiences about the issues (for example, have a 5 minute speech prepared, fliers with an overview, a one pager with more details, or a game)
- Show a film (that relates to the issue) and then give a brief talk afterwards
- Solicit invitations from local radio or television programs to talk on air
- Garner support from trusted organizations or agencies for them to share with their network and that you can list on your outreach materials as a partner
- Give people a list of tasks they can do: from very simple (make a call) to more involved (join a working group)
- Find fun ways to engage young people, encourage intergenerational participation, and use visual material and stories to encourage participation



TALK IT UP

Share information about the process and your successes after each key action or event, and at the end of a process. Doing so will build trust and help you recruit new members. Some information will be for your internal team only; but, all of your achievements should be shared widely.

- Designate a point person for each particular event (someone who will attend meetings, take notes, share back)
- Make sure that notes are always shared and that information for wider circulation is sent out via the appropriate communication channels as soon as possible
- Have 2 or 3 point people to share the responsibility of attending events, documenting, and communicating (to avoid burnout)
- Report back to the entire community via media (newspapers, radio, social media), neighborhood association and NPU meetings, and other creative venues (at public school events, in the grocery store parking lot)
- Share back successful results from any action or group engagement process; internally, outline how the results did or did not map onto your goals
- Ask people for feedback about how you're doing

Share Your Story

IN YOUR WORDS

HOST EVENTS

NARRATE TOGETHER

COLLECT DATA

APPLY YOUR SKILLS

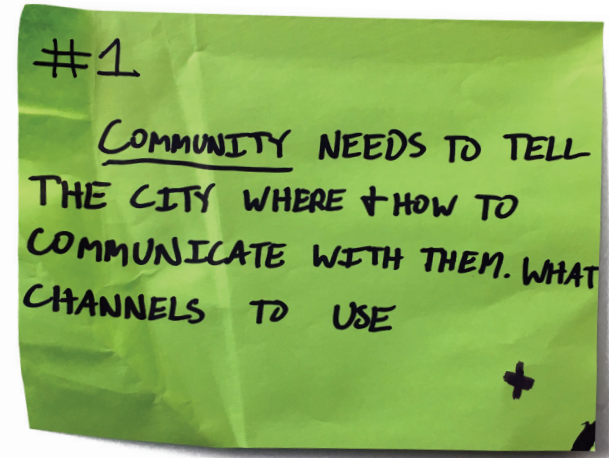
INCLUDE EVERYONE

Storytelling, in various forms and through different channels, allows you to **share ideas and information in rich ways**. This helps you recruit and reach out to members, **mobilize around a shared vision for the future**, and gain outside support. These plays aim to support you and your members in telling your own story in your own words.



IN YOUR OWN WORDS

Craft a story about the change you want to see and tell it in your own words. Bring together individual stories into a common storytelling thread and under a unified vision to help your community association align with a set of shared values and ideas about how to create change.



- Identify key characters, conflicts, and resolutions to tell a story about your history, past successes, and desired outcomes
- Pick emotionally engaging methods through which to tell your story: video, spoken word, text, pictures
- Use the story to explain your vision for the future
- Tell your audience how they can help you achieve this shared vision
- Create multiple stories: about individual community members, your organization, and your vision for the future

 Action Guide: Storytelling



HOST EVENTS

Create your own events—talks, walks, workshops, parties, festivals—that allow you to tell your story in a creative and public venue. Plan new events that support, complement, and offer something different from other community events. Or ask if you could co-host or simply be on the agenda at an existing event with a shared purpose. Use events as ways to broadcast your story but also as opportunities to support others.


- Develop an events calendar that balances fun with issues-based work
- Aim to accomplish a number of your goals through events (recruiting new members, building alliances, educating community members)
- Promote your public events as places for partners to share information or host projects that align with your vision and values



NARRATE TOGETHER

Align with other community groups to create a shared community story that represents more people and outlines a collective vision for the future. Shared stories help form connections that will enable you to accomplish tasks that are too large for you to take on by yourself.

- Establish a working group to help build the alliance
- Craft a general list of shared community goals and visions
- Find and enlist alliance members that agree on the goals & vision
- Identify mutual benefits
- Make a plan for sharing your combined stories and vision

 *Action Guide: Forming an Alliance or Partnership*



COLLECT DATA

Collect and share data to strengthen your story and support your vision for the future. Stories help people to identify with you while numbers help drive your point home. Identify goals for data collection and analysis and partner with outside groups to train fellow community members to help shape and direct data work.

- Find out what data already exists (start with the Atlanta Regional Commission: <http://opendata.atlantaregional.com/>)
- Identify gaps in existing data
- Decide which collection methods to use
- Collect your data
- Share it as part of your story
- For more substantial initiatives, select a research guide designed for community-based organizations and follow it



APPLY YOUR SKILLS

Apply your skills, experiences, and knowledge in spaces where decisions are made. Lead workshops and partner with service providers and other community associations. Encourage community members to run for positions or sit on decision-making boards at the city, regional, and state levels.



- Decide who to send to events based on the opportunity and goals for leadership development
- Identify gaps in the skill sets of your members and host workshops, seek out seminars and classes, and invite subject matter experts to speak at your meetings to help build the capacities of your members
- Give new members talking points or send them with experienced representatives
- Make your case when you have a stake in a debate or just show up to listen and represent your organization
- Sign up to be on advisory committees for engagement processes or to advise specific agencies or outside organizations working in your community
- Report back to your organization, members, and allies in a timely manner



INCLUDE EVERYONE

Encourage and foster diversity—of race, class, age, background, and perspective. Show this diversity in your organization, in the stories you tell, and in your engagements. Create a governance structure that is open and democratic. Develop a leadership team that reflect the diversity of your community and thereby your association.



- Set intentional values and goals regarding inclusion and diversity
- Train community members and staff on cultural/class competency
- Look for under-represented groups and find ways to bring them into your association
- Create volunteer and leadership development plans that are accessible for everyone
- Intentionally develop and support leadership from under-represented groups
- Ensure that the story you share represents the community's make-up
- Consider a system for setting aside board and leadership positions for people from your community's ethnic/cultural groups
- Develop a conflict resolution policy

Step Up

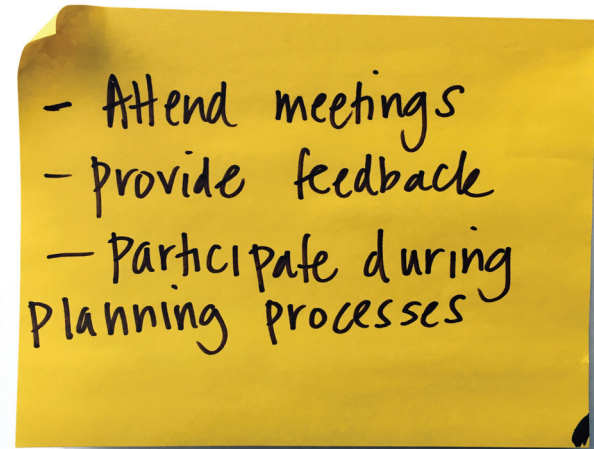
TAKE THE LEAD
STAY ENERGIZED
LEARN AND GROW
OWN THE RESULTS
ASK FOR SUPPORT
MAKE IT LAST

Your community engagement work is never finished, but these plays are for you to use when a project or process is drawing to a close. Proving yourself as a capable leader attracts additional resources and helps **assure outcomes of engagement processes are sustainable** and woven into the long-term community planning and visioning.



TAKE THE LEAD

Demonstrate your ability to lead by identifying opportunities, sharing the role with other community groups, and delivering results. Leading will be easier if you have recruited members, built community-wide support and trust for what you do, and worked closely with partners.



- Observe other organizations and representatives leading
- Jump into conversations and practice sharing ideas and garnering support
- Find a mentor or set of mentors
- Take advantage of learning opportunities
- Listen to your community
- Consider the needs and desires of the individuals in your group
- Consider the group as a whole
- Propose specific actions, programs, and/or policies (internal to a project, for your community association, the NPU, City Council, etc.)
- Follow through on tasks you've signed up to complete



STAY ENERGIZED

To stay energized, make intentional plans that will help you keep up momentum and avoid burnout. Community association leaders and volunteers often talk about feeling overwhelmed and overworked. When you and your volunteers and leaders are called on again and again, it can be exhausting. Don't be afraid to say no to projects and point them to a sister organization. And remember to save time for celebration, breaks, and reflection.



LEARN AND GROW

Seek out and invest in opportunities for learning and growth. To step up into leadership roles, you may need to develop new skills, or find more resources. In addition to financial resources, you may need, for example: volunteers with skills in communications and social media, and/or additional help finding and securing funding.

- Focus on key issues as they related to your organization's mission
 - Seek out help managing time effectively
 - Be creative about sharing the workload (e.g. train a youth group to run arts and culture workshops for younger children)
 - Make time for reflection and redirection
 - Learn to say no; this is easier when you build capacity in and alliances with other community associations that focus on (and can represent) separate issues
 - For seasoned leaders: to keep the organization energetic and fresh, groom successors so you can take a break or move from leadership to support
 - Delegate to your leadership team; share the work as evenly as possible
 - Recruit new members
 - Create space for celebration
 - Take time off
-
- Identify the skills and resources you need to evolve
 - Create individual leadership development plans for key staff/volunteers
 - Allocate resources to education-whether tradition or non-traditional
 - Partner with other Atlanta community associations to co-host trainings
 - Conduct best practice research on how other community associations are run and handle similar issues
 - Seek partnerships within Atlanta's numerous colleges and universities; a professor may speak to your group; students may volunteer at your events or join your organization; a class may share their research with you on a key issue
 - When working on projects with the City or other service provider partners, advocate for some education and training as part of new initiatives
 - Attend national conferences for community associations or trainings for organizing



OWN THE RESULTS

Own the results by taking responsibility for all the steps of the project, identify challenges that come up along the way, and work pro-actively to address them. Partner on engagements when the focus is tied to an issue you are working on. As the community association with the knowledge and participation of the people, you can make the impact of these projects last and draw on the outcomes.

- In collaborations, don't think of the project facilitator or funder as the "boss," but take ownership early on—especially, when problems come up
- Ask for support or help when necessary, but find ways to get internal support to get work done
- Create a strong governance structure with checks and balances for accountability
- Remain committed to the project's specific goals, framework, and process but also model your ways of getting results
- Build systems to own the continued work after the project is complete
- Remember that at every step you are working to show that you are capable of leading



ASK FOR SUPPORT

Ask for and seek out support towards the end of the project to attract more sustainable and collaborative work in the future. You need resources to do your work successfully and to take ownership of projects. Don't be afraid to request that you get paid for work, and for opportunities for internal learning and education.

- Assess financial and other resource support available from foundations (local foundations are often the best bet but look to regional and national funders as well)
- Ask for private donations from individuals who support your work
- Make your case to donors with documentation about your activities, history, and impact
- Consider a membership fee structure that takes income into account and goes to funding work that the entire community benefits from
- Consider income-generating activities (like tours, an annual concert or festival, summer camps, or even a neighborhood merchandise store)
- Partner with other organizations and service providers for funding sources that require more than you are capable of. Don't be afraid to craft creative partnerships (e.g. work with an artist on a community mural) in order to expand your work, impact, and funding sources
- Make use of volunteers (ask them to raise a certain amount annually)
- Utilize all communication channels to raise funds (such as letter writing and on-line crowdsourcing campaigns)



MAKE IT LAST

Make sure that the work you do is sustainable. Individual engagements or issue campaigns are just one step towards creating a world in which your longer-term vision is possible. Take care of yourselves and the organization. Take time to plan for the future and look past the issues you are focused on in the present. This will energize your members, keep the day-to-day work connected to a longer-term vision, and remind you about how to apply the results from one project to the next step in your overall plan.

- Do community visioning workshops
- Come up with a list of overall goals and don't be afraid to think about things that might only be possible with systemic change
- Create 5 and 10-year plans and share them publicly, especially with the City's Planning Department who also does 5 and 10 year plans
- Make space and time for evaluation, reflection, and redirection. Evaluate partnerships, projects, impact, governance structure, and more
- After an engagement, take time to assess how the changes the project led to have shifted your work or can be plugged directly into a new initiative
- When finishing a specific issue campaign, incorporate the lessons learned and evidence of success into your overall messaging
- Try to develop relationships with long-standing agencies or nonprofits that can help with funding or that you can pass successful projects to, or partner with when they become too large to manage

3 Plays for Service Providers

PRINCIPLES



Build Holistically: Seek out people who are often excluded; provide equal access and opportunity; give all community members and groups the support they need to be actively involved; remove discrimination and barriers; create a sense of belonging and mutual respect.



Act Sustainably: Maintain the benefits of a process over time; make relationships, project outcomes, and engagement permanent; allow residents to lead the work, and build the capacity of the community.



Work Transparently: Promote and invite openness, conversation, debate, and accountability; create a culture in which information—on agreements, transactions, practices, research, and rules—is shared. Invite feedback and act on that feedback.

Lay The Groundwork

- IDENTIFY INTERESTS
- REACH OUT
- CO-CREATE GOALS
- OFFER TRAINING
- USE NEW CHANNELS
- ASK FOR FEEDBACK

Listen and Learn

- MEET 1:1
- SHOW UP
- PARTNER
- SEEK OUT DATA
- LET COMMUNITIES LEAD
- MAKE SPACE FOR ALL

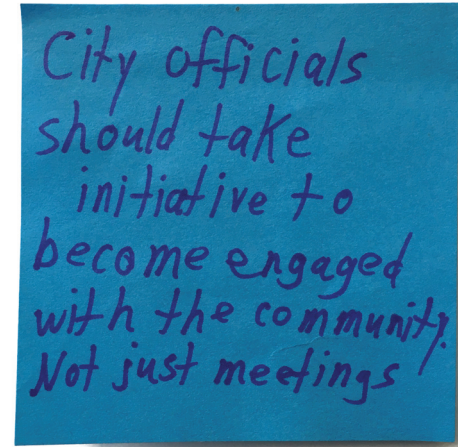
Step Back

- FOLLOW THROUGH
- BUILD CAPACITY
- CHECK IN
- GIVE RESPONSIBILITY
- EVALUATE
- SHARE

Lay The Groundwork

IDENTIFY INTERESTS
REACH OUT
CO-CREATE GOALS
OFFER TRAINING
USE NEW CHANNELS
ASK FOR FEEDBACK

Careful planning, research, and relationship building, **grounded in your commitment to including all stakeholders**, strengthens your ability to plan and execute successful projects and **achieve higher overall levels of engagement.**




IDENTIFY INTERESTS

Identify and get to know the residents and community groups and their specific interests for your target area. Work inclusively with all stakeholders—and especially those who may not be actively engaged or easily reached.

Before starting an engagement project determine:

- What specific impact the issue or proposals will likely have on stakeholder groups (both in the short term and long term)
- If any stakeholders are currently working on the same issue, and could they be a partner or support the work in some way
- Which stakeholder groups will take an active role in the project and which will take a more passive or observational role
- How resources (finances, team members, time, etc.) should be organized in order to reach all stakeholders
- Which stage in the engagement cycle to work with different stakeholders (and why)
- Who represents specific interest groups
- Whether there are existing communication channels for specific groups
- Whether there are on-line groups that care about the issue or community and what their communication channels are

 *Action Guide: Creating a Stakeholder Interest Map*



REACH OUT

Develop an outreach plan and be specific as to who is in your target group. Outreach should aim to get participation from all stakeholders and establish a group representative of your community's geography, race/ethnicity, age, and other demographic characteristics. Build relationships with local groups that work with hard to-reach populations to encourage their participation. Regularly measure who you are reaching and be proactive about going to where people are instead of assuming they will come to you.

- Define outreach goals, strategies, and activities based on what you know about the different target groups
- Connect outreach goals with ongoing community-based work
- Work with your partners to broaden your reach through diverse communication channels
- Work with trusted residents and stakeholders, not necessarily leaders, to further your reach



Action Guide: Creating an Outreach Plan



CO-CREATE GOALS

Share all the required and predetermined goals with partners and stakeholders to act transparently and build trust. Create opportunities for stakeholders or partners to work with you to collaboratively set additional goals. Be open about any limitations with respect to resources and the scope of work and set clear expectations. When working with larger groups or agencies, be sure to clearly set expectations and define roles and responsibilities.

- Outline the project limitations at the beginning of the process
- Come up with a long list of possible goals and present them to community partners
- Be sure the goals are measurable, impactful, and ambitious but attainable
- Use a working group session to prioritize the goals most important to different stakeholders
- Set benchmark goals, or the smaller goals that will show whether you are on track to achieve the ultimate goals
- Get feedback on refined, prioritized goals from other service providers and community leaders
- Create action plans by working backwards from each goal
- Share your goals as widely as possible to garner more support and possible partners



OFFER TRAINING

Develop and support the education of residents and community associations on how to participate in decision-making processes and on the impact their participation has on the city. Provide background information when a particular topic is confusing or when additional knowledge may be needed in order for people to make informed decisions. Include internal education with your staff and partners on best practices in engagement, on the context and history in the target area, and on the issue at hand.

- Talk to the stakeholders who are least engaged to gauge what trainings might be useful to help support their participation
- Get advice from subject matter experts about what background information residents need in order to make informed decisions
- Partner with a group of community-based trainers, local colleges/ universities or technical assistants to co-facilitate information sessions
- Host train-the-trainer sessions to train residents to lead information sessions and workshops
- Put together a simple website, flier, or one pager about the project and use clear and accessible language to explain the issue/s you plan to address



USE NEW CHANNELS

Make use of multiple communication channels (face-to-face, on-line and off-line: groups, organizations, mass media, community, and a combination of these). Use the preferred communication networks of the stakeholders to reach people where they are. Don't be afraid to be creative and adventurous: plan an open mic night, ask a question (for example: what is your favorite thing about Atlanta?) and ask for answers in the form of photographs on Instagram, invite area youth to design an engagement event from start to finish.

- Analyze the message you want to share and decide on the right channels accordingly (for instance, use Twitter for a short message, Facebook Live to stream while at an event, or email to convey a more lengthy message)
- Keep in mind that all messages should be rather succinct to keep people's attention
- Decide whether you will pay for any communications: advertising spots on the radio or a designer to create material or a website
- Use interactive channels (a feedback page on-line or a workshop or town hall meeting) when you need a response
- Assess whether channels are reaching your target audiences and change your approach when necessary



ASK FOR FEEDBACK

Build in feedback loops for collecting honest assessments at the outset of your project. Ask for feedback from staff, partners, and participants at events and meetings. Don't rely on feedback from only a few individuals, or from people who don't represent your target groups. Ask for feedback on your outreach, internal processes, and whether you've achieved higher levels of engagement.

- If you have a website, set goals for the numbers of visits, track and analyze visitors
- Use simple web-based surveys tools (like Survey Monkey) to send surveys via e-mail
- Give participants at key events self-addressed postcards to send back with feedback
- Have staff make a few "thank you" calls to stakeholders using a script of questions and ask for feedback
- If you have an advisory board, ask them to get feedback from their communities
- Have program staff who are working on-the-ground solicit informal feedback

Listen And Learn

MEET 1:1
SHOW UP
PARTNER
SEEK OUT DATA
LET COMMUNITIES LEAD
MAKE SPACE FOR ALL

Listen and learn to create authentic engagements that build from community-led work. Listening to and learning from community stories, the experiences of other service providers, and the hopes and dreams envisioned by community groups helps you **create holistic and inclusive engagements rooted in community assets.**



MEET 1:1

Make relationship development a primary area of your work. Meet one on one with key people in the community or at service provider organizations. Ask a broad range of questions to get to know people or organization's backgrounds and the issues they care about. Ask community members about their vision for their community. Get advice from those who have done similar work in the past before designing your engagement. .

Questions for community members:

- What do you like best about your community or the City of Atlanta?
- What would you like to change?
- What are the issues you care the most about?
- Are you a member of the community association or another community group?
- Do you attend meetings regularly?
- Are there other ways you participate in decision-making, at any level?
- How do you share and receive communication about the issues you care about?

Questions to ask other service providers:

- Which community leaders or organizations do you work most closely with?
- What lessons have you learned?
- What advice do you have for us?
- Who else do you suggest we reach out to?
- Do you have any background materials (e.g. reports, data) that you could share?
- What are the constraints in working in this neighborhood and/or on this issue?



SHOW UP

Attend a broad range of community-based events to get to know residents and issues. Attend the community association and/or NPU meetings and the meetings of potential partner service providers. There is a benefit to observing prior to engaging, if time permits. Be a consistent and known presence in the community. Share information about your project when you are ready to engage (after incorporating community and partner feedback into the plan).

- Check calendars at locally significant places, such as places of worship, community centers, hair salons, and barbershops
- Find out if there is an existing shared community calendar
- Get to know the schedules of the target group you are working with (e.g. do many residents work in the service industry and work nights and weekends?) and plan accordingly
- Plan around existing events of community-wide importance
- Create your own calendar and make it publicly accessible, or work with another group that maintains a community-wide calendar and post events centrally



PARTNER

Partner with others who work in or with the community. Listen and learn from community members while sharing decision-making power. Build partnerships with a clear governance structure built on: trust and respect, a shared set of ethical values, diversity of skills and experiences, and an agreement to compromise when disagreements arise.

- For big projects, before you decide on a partnership, create an early working group with representatives from potential partners. Outline individual and group goals and sketch out preliminary plans.
- If, during the working group stage, it becomes clear that goals or other key aspects are not aligned, don't be afraid to say that partnership doesn't make sense.
- Write out a partnership agreement or Memorandum of Understanding
- Clearly define each partner's specific roles and responsibilities in the agreement
- Determine the resources (including funds) available for the project and how they will be allocated and include these details in the written agreement
- Create a set structure for decision making and a policy for conflict resolution
- Work with partners to identify and plan for potential constraints and challenges



Action Guide: Creating a Memorandum of Understanding



Action Guide: Forming an Alliance or Partnership



SEEK OUT DATA

Seek out easily accessible data on area demographics—such as income, age, race/ethnicity, literacy rate and high school graduation rate—and other background information on your target area such as reports or presentations from community associations.

- Read annual reports of service providers
- Use datasets publicly accessible to avoid replicating work (e.g. the Atlanta Regional Commission has publicly accessible data and reports: <http://www.atlantaregional.com/aging-resources/demographic-data>)
- Ask a community member or a topic expert to present to your team
- Create a central repository and share the data and information you collect



LET COMMUNITIES LEAD

Create opportunities for community members to apply their skills and expertise to lead your engagement. Learn about the specific histories, assets, and capabilities of the community and use those to help establish a community-led vision for the future.

- Find the residents with the background knowledge and skills directly related to the topic at hand and invite them to participate
- Invite specific community members or organizational representatives (based on your knowledge of the community and the advice of your partners) to work with in you some capacity
- Develop a working process that accommodates all participating community members (meetings should be at a time and a place that facilitates participation)
- Build in time for community representatives to get wider community input on questions whenever necessary
- Know who is often asked to participate in these engagements and work with community associations to identify and develop new leaders
- Recognize community members for their work and participation with payments, honorariums, gift cards, or even bartering of services
- When putting together an advisory board, make it representative of the community's background (e.g. socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, level of education)



MAKE SPACE FOR ALL

Make inclusion and diversity a priority for every aspect of your engagement practice. Design programs and projects for diverse participants. Invite community members of various ages, education levels, perspectives, and experiences; include residents from different socioeconomic, ethnic, and political backgrounds at all levels of the project.

- Design programming and events for the current diversity of the area and anticipate and design for an even more diverse future (especially if you are working in a more homogeneous neighborhood)
- Remember to change your engagement practices based on the group (have youth groups help run and plan events targeting youth so that the activities planned are appealing for young people)
- When possible, combine two different groups to work together such as having youth interview senior citizens in the community or senior agency staff
- Work to ensure that staff represent the communities in which they work
 - If this is a challenge (e.g. you are working on environmental problems or infrastructure development that requires high levels of specific knowledge), provide cultural/class competency training whenever possible
- Seek out resources on designing programs effectively for diverse communities or providing internal cultural competency trainings

Step Back

FOLLOW THROUGH
BUILD CAPACITY
CHECK IN
GIVE RESPONSIBILITY
EVALUATE
SHARE

Stepping back when the time is right allows you to hand over relevant pieces of ongoing engagement work to community associations and to **turn your attention to building capacities in other communities or neighborhoods**. These plays encourage service providers to: step back, but not leave; follow through and check in; build community-based capacity; and, evaluate the process and share results.



FOLLOW THROUGH

Follow through to ensure that all outstanding tasks have been completed. Following through on promises and goals helps to maintain strong relationships and build and sustain trust. Good follow through is the most important thing you can do to build credibility and reputation for collaboration on future engagements.



- Make clear all project goals and individual and group responsibilities
- Be flexible and make space for adjustments within the larger project structure
- Assign point people or work groups to lead specific areas of work
- Create action plans for all partners and key participants
- Check in as a group as well as one-on-one
- Share benchmark goals
- Outline a process for report backs and follow ups internally as well as for your target group
- Develop a process for sharing and dealing with any challenges
- Periodically review the goals and the roles/responsibilities and shift them if necessary
- As challenges come up, look for patterns so you can make larger scale changes as necessary
- Collect data and feedback throughout the process

 *Action Guide: Creating an Action Plan*



BUILD CAPACITY

Build the capacity in communities, from the individual participant to community association partners. Community capacity is how people and groups, using the resources at hand, solve problems and improve the overall well-being of the community. Communities with the capacity to lead engagements, while including and “getting out” all voices, have high levels of participation, greater success with their projects, and more sustainable impacts.

- Create a plan for developing specific skills and knowledge areas for individual participants, community partners, and the community as a whole
- Partner with community associations, leaders, both visible and untapped; and area colleges and universities for information and on workshops and trainings
- Share responsibilities, big or small depending on the capabilities, for the project
- Create staff positions, volunteer opportunities, and community advisory board roles
- Integrate workshops and trainings into the project and connect community groups to outside educational opportunities
- Over time, hand over more responsibility to the community partner(s)
- Track progress, lessons learned, and share stories that highlight community partners’ role in success (thus drawing positive attention and possibly future resources directly to the community groups)
- Follow community advice in adapting engagement practices based on audience, communication networks, and the specific context of the community
- Direct funding, education, and technical assistance resources to the community
- Hand over the outcomes of the work (e.g. a playbook that you worked together to create!) to be held by community groups and utilized in their future work



CHECK IN

Check in with community members and partner groups after an engagement is over. Engagement is more than just collecting data or getting feedback. At its core are relationships, which require that you offer the community continued support. That support may mean: communicating often with partners, finding ways to assist them, working with them to monitor the long-term impact of a project, and connecting them to relevant resources and service providers as new issues arise.

- Create calendar reminders to reach out to community partners on a regular basis
- Invite them to your events and attend their events
- Promote their work and events via your communication channels and ask them to do the same
- Talk them up in reports, at conferences, and to other service providers
- Connect them with resources whenever possible
- Introduce them to funders that you know
- Invite them to present with you about work you've done together at events or conferences
- Provide them with support to evaluate the longer-term impacts of your co-led engagements



GIVE RESPONSIBILITY

Give responsibility in order to encourage ownership and leadership. Commit to capacity building and allow community partners a significant amount of power to design and run engagements; share responsibility for the final results—whether it is an art mural or the draft language for a proposal of new City policy.

- Build partnerships with a community associations
- Follow engagement principles
- Let community lead and help to build up community resources
- Connect community members with opportunities to build from the project process or outcomes
- Focus on results that community groups already have the skills to achieve and build from there (rather than results that require the help of outside service providers)



EVALUATE

Evaluate your engagement outcomes. Conduct internal evaluation by asking what worked and what didn't in terms of your own structure, process, and partnerships? Also save time for more thorough program evaluations that investigate: did the engagement achieve the goals? How did participants perceive the program? Who did we reach? Work with community associations on evaluation to increase their capacity to run their own evaluation processes.

- Plan evaluation from the beginning of the project; talk to people about your progress, seek out data, and create feedback loops, so it will be much easier to evaluate at the end of an engagement
- Provide staff, community members, and engagement participants with easy mechanisms to provide feedback
- Ask simple questions: What worked? What could be improved? What would you do to create a better process and result?
- When necessary, assess and change internal processes based on evaluations
- Work to create a culture in which you give and receive constructive criticism and are open to making mistakes and learning from them as a healthy part of the process
- Leave room for evaluating and adapting after milestones are achieved



SHARE

Share information about process and project outcomes to build trust and improve future work. Share lessons learned with your immediate teams, stakeholders, and communities; but, aim to reach a wider audience, such as everyone working on similar engagement projects around the country.

- Use your various networks to share lessons learned and project frameworks
- Share results differently based on the audience you want to reach (e.g. report, presentation, storytelling event, series of images, mural, etc.)
- Partner with educational institutions so that lessons learned are shared in teaching and learning spaces
- Use diverse and creative communications networks (link to play)
- Share at the city, state, regional, and even national levels at conferences, webinars, and/or civic engagement workshops
- Encourage and support community-based partners to attend events with you or to connect with other community associations at the local, regional, and national levels

4 Action Guides

The following Action Guides provide more detail for how to implement some of the plays described in this playbook. These guides are meant to help community associations to become leaders and support service providers' partnership with local groups.

These and additional guides can be found on-line at:

<http://ourcommunity.is/engaged/action-guides>

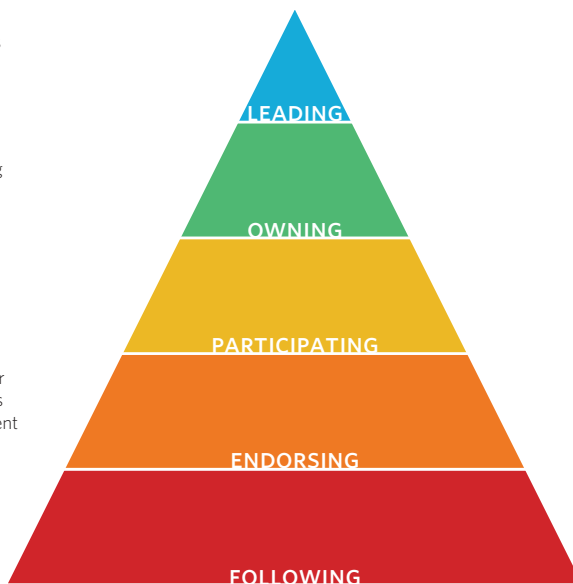
Leading: Directs the work, acts as thought leader, and leads and engages others.

Owning: Fully invested in the success of the process and willing to follow up on it or build from it afterwards.

Participating: Participates at the level of spending time working or contributing other resources.

Endorsing: Does not participate or contribute resources but endorses the process or a specific component like the organization or an event.

Following: Is interested in and follows the process and actively seeks out information about it.



Recruiting New Members

Create a plan for recruiting new members by asking the following questions:

- Why do you want new members?
- How many members do you need?
- What kind of members do you need?
- Where will you find them?
- Who is going to bring in the new members?
- How should you convince them to join?
- What is your plan if they say no or maybe?

Tips for 1:1 conversations with new members:

- Tell them the purpose of the organization
- Set the tone by explaining the agenda for the meeting
- Tell them you want to get to know them and their specific needs
- Ask questions to understand their values and interests and share your own
- Ask whether the issue they care about is important enough for them to act on it
- Ask questions that motivate them to make change: "Can you remember standing up for something that was important for you and making change happen?" "What was that like?"
- Get a commitment: ask them to do something to help support the work (start with a simple task)
- Stress the urgency of the ask and emphasize the collective group and the values involved
- Make sure they understand exactly what you are asking them to do and leave room for questions
- End the meeting with a specific set of tasks for next steps and a plan for you to follow up to make sure they are able to do them

Creating an Action Plan

This action plan is an accountability tool to outline who is responsible for performing what, when, and how.

Point Person

The point person is responsible for ensuring that the goal is progressing as planned with every step taken. S/he manages the project. The point person is responsible for reminding everyone of their tasks, connecting people with one another for shared projects, and following up to make sure each task is completed. The point person has the bird's eye view, as they coordinate resources, report on project progress and results, and work to ensure alignment with the overall strategic vision.

TASK:			
POINT PERSON:			
CHECK-IN DATES			
OBJECTIVES	PERSONS INVOLVED	DATES	OUTCOMES
Example: Follow up with Jackson Elementary School about scheduling your upcoming workshop there.	Mike volunteered to check with the principle. Ashley said she'd check the overall school calendar to see if there are any other events that night	Mike is following up on 9/24 and Ashley said she'd be able to check in over the next few days. They are reporting back to the group in a week.	Mike and Ashley reported back to the group: The principle told Mike they'd love to host the event and Ashley found no conflicts.

Action Planning Checklist

Whenever goals are set, immediately schedule a date and time to check on progress.

1. Set the context, and speak the language of the community:

- What is the objective?
- Who is it benefitting and how?
- Describe how the implementation is coming along.
- What has changed since the goals were set?
- Why were these goals set in the first place?
- What do the stakeholders expect will be accomplished?
- Check in periodically to ensure that everyone is on the same page before moving forward

2. Report back: Individual assignments:

- What were the actions taken since the last meeting?
- What has been accomplished?
- Challenges that need to be addressed including new findings?
- What requires more focus and effort?

3. Move the plan forward:

In moving the plan forward, it is necessary to look at the challenges and decide what will be the best course of action. Depending on the challenges, some matters might require fast and immediate attention while others may require a step back and restructuring. Whenever there are problems:

- Try to find a pattern, if challenges keep coming up
- Identify what is moving forward and how you might use areas of strength to support the challenge areas
- Ask experts and mentors for advice and seek out resources on best practices

4. Next meeting:

Recap the previous meeting:

- Outline the new assignments
- Provide next meeting date and time
- Assign a person to send invitations out for the next meeting when to send and to whom should be decided first

5. Everyone's opinion matters:

Once the plan has been set, time for reflection is necessary to build in to allow everyone an opportunity to present feedback on the next steps for implementation. This should be a very brief, focused dialogue to understand the different needs and learn from one another.

- What did you learn from this meeting?
- What was helpful for you?
- What would you like to see happening?

City residents	4	2 or 3	Consistent, efficient, and safe trash pickup	Neighborhood associations, NPUs, 311, Social Media, E-mail.	Attend events to talk about challenges and suggest solutions; submit proposals; request brainstorming sessions with dept. leadership	Provide relevant feedback on what they want and plans, vote at the neighborhood associations and report votes to the NPU.	Provide simple information to everyone; partner closely with neighborhood associations and key leaders; get feedback at multiple public events and workshops	How Much Does Project Impact Them (4: very high; 3: high; 2: moderate; 1:low)	What is their level of influence related to the specific engagement? (4: very high; 3: high; 2: moderate; 1:low)	What Issues do they care the most about?	What are the main communication channels they use?	How can they contribute to the engagement process?	Ways to best involve the stakeholder
Solid waste services employees	4	2	Working conditions, pay, changes that incorporate their feedback.	Workplace meetings, phone, text, and email.									

The fictional examples used below are for a community engagement about how to improve solid waste pickup services

Creating a Stakeholder Interest Map

Forming an Alliance or Partnership

Step	Background/Example
Write up your reasons for partnering	To offer one another's members services; To work together on a large-scale funded project you couldn't do alone; To increase the number of volunteers on a "get out the vote" initiative.
Define stakeholders	Your network and all the networks of alliance members; any new stakeholders (funders, public partners) who might be attracted by the larger initiative.
Outline each groups needs and strengths	One group may run history tours, while another one hosts an after school program for youth.
Talk about each group's reputation and reach within the community	Each group likely has different levels of influence and skills with familiarity among different community groups and outside leaders.
Identify leaders	Leaders should come from all groups and they should be able to help build the coalition.
Define the steps and roles necessary for success	What specifically has to be done? When? Who will do it? What happens if things don't go as planned?
Design strategies to divide tasks fairly	Make sure that you have good communication and processes around deciding who will do what and following up with one another. In partnerships, it is easy to assume someone else is doing the work.
Create a plan to measure effectiveness	Regularly evaluate your work together and create plans for providing feedback and changing things as necessary.

Storytelling

Community organizers tell stories to communicate values and motivate people to take action. Marshall Ganz, known for his research and teaching on effective community organizing, has created a Public Narrative framework based on stories told by successful organizers. It is comprised of three stories:

- A story of self: why you were called to what you have been called to
- A story of us: what your constituency, community, organization has been called to: its shared purposes, goals, vision
- A story of now: the challenge this community now faces, the choices it must make, and the hope to which “we” can aspire

Ganz believed that stories: “move to action by mobilizing sources of motivation, constructing new shared individual and collective identities, and finding the courage to act.” Stories are about people. The storyteller asks audiences to identify with a character, to feel empathy for the character’s circumstances and needs, and to act in response. In order to create successful community stories, incorporate the main elements of a good story:

CHALLENGE: Like any good story, community-led campaigns for change include conflict. Identify the conflict you want to focus on and define the stakes of the conflict in your own terms and language.

CHARACTERS: Messengers are often just as important as the message. Cast your characters carefully. Who is receiving the most attention in the story (an everyday person or a leader?). Who do you want to hold up as the heroes and why?

CHOICE: Everyone likes to make up their own mind—as opposed to being told what to think and feel. Make sure that your message is part of an organic and compelling story in its own right. Hitting your audience over the head with a message rather than a real story can make people upset and frustrated with you.

OUTCOME: What happens at the end of your story? Try to make sure that you both end a story well; but also, use foreshadowing to suggest an alternative future that is in line with your values and vision. It should give your audience a sense of trust in you and also call on them to act.¹

¹ Works cited: Ilyse Hogue and Patrick Reinsborough smartMeme Strategy and Training Project, 2004; Marshall Ganz, “Telling Your Public Story: Self, Us, Now,” 2007.

Creating an Outreach Plan

Offline outreach channels:

- Door-to-door
- In public spaces: parks, grocery stores, at the MARTA station
- Events and celebrations
- Meetings of other groups, related to your project by issue or geography
- Community newsletters
- Newspapers
- Public radio and television
- Storytelling, arts or cultural events
- Neighborhood association and NPU meetings
- Parent association meetings
- After school programs for youth

Online outreach channels:

- Twitter
- Facebook
- Instagram
- YouTube
- Neighborhood networks or e-mail lists

Outreach Plan Template			
Target Group	Outreach Methods	When?	Resources?
Area high school students	Campaign on social media using channels we’ve confirmed via research that they use; Create a hashtag for the event	Month of September	10 volunteers; 5 student helpers; 2 staff members; \$400 stipends for student helpers

Creating a Memorandum of Understanding Template

This memorandum of understanding (MOU) constitutes a description of a relationship between _____, and _____. It outlines the intent of _____ and _____ to collaborate in mutually beneficial activities in the interest of furthering the missions of both organizations.

It is understood that this MOU is a letter of intent only and the participants agree to proceed in good faith to determine the feasibility of the collaboration described in this MOU. No participant shall have any legal obligation to the other as a result of this MOU other than as expressly stated herein. This MOU does not constitute a binding agreement nor does it constitute an agreement to enter into an agreement.

1.0 Intent of Participants

It is the intent of _____ and _____ to participate in a collaborative effort to _____.

_____ The two entities will also work together to _____. This collaboration will result in the following intended outcomes: _____.

2.0 Responsibilities and Timeline

Describe how responsibilities are divided and the timeline for completing agreed upon work.

3.0 MOU Termination

The undertakings of the parties described in this MOU will expire on _____. Either party may terminate its continued participation in the discussions contemplated by this MOU, and the MOU, at any time and for any reason or no reason by giving the other party written notice of the termination. Signed, emailed or faxed documents shall constitute originals and written notice.

4.0 Points of Contact

Each participant agrees to provide a point of contact, who will serve as the responsible person to ensure that activities outlined in this MOU are accomplished as agreed. For _____, the person is _____. For _____, the person is _____.

5.0 Communications

Communications between _____ and _____ will be accomplished through _____.

6.0 Fees & Expenses

_____ shall pay for expenses in connection with the proposed project but not to exceed _____ and pending discussion and approval from the _____ working team and the community-based coalition.

7.0 Confidentiality

_____ and _____ agree that no press release or other general public announcement (including in any trade journal or other publication) of the transaction shall be made without the prior written consent of each of the parties hereto, except to the extent that disclosure may be required by law, in which case the party required to make such disclosure will give the other party prior notice.

8.0 Binding Nature of This Letter

This MOU is not intended to be a binding agreement, except as set forth in sections 6.0 and 7.0, each of which shall be binding on the parties and their respective successors and assigns. Except as provided in the preceding sentence, the parties will not be contractually bound unless and until Definitive Agreements have been prepared and executed. This MOU shall be governed by the internal laws of the State of Georgia, without regard to its conflicts-of-law principles.

Signing this MOU indicates agreement with the foregoing.

This Memorandum of Understanding will be effective _____.

_____ Date

_____ Date

5 Resources

For questions about this playbook, or to get additional paper copies, please contact the Office of Zoning & Development:

55 Trinity Avenue
Suite 3350
Atlanta, Georgia 30303
Tel: 404-330-6145

NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS

There are a total of 242 officially defined neighborhoods in Atlanta. More than 40 neighborhood associations are chartered to provide community members with a place to come together and work on issues of mutual concern. Neighborhood associations discuss matters of neighborhood and citywide importance and make recommendations to their Neighborhood Planning Unit (see below). Since they can enter into contracts with outside parties, neighborhood associations often serve a number of functions: from affordable housing developers to providers of youth programming. For information about the community/neighborhood association where you live, visit:

<http://bit.ly/ATLneighborhoodgroups>

NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING UNITS

The NPU system includes a set of 25 citizen advisory councils that make recommendations to the Mayor and the City Council on planning issues and legislation. The NPUs were established in 1974 to ensure that all Atlanta residents, particularly those from historically disenfranchised groups, would have a voice in decisions. The NPUs are self governed and allowed to write their own bylaws. The only requirement is that once a year the bylaws are voted on and every resident and business owner is allowed a vote. As such, each NPU's guidelines are different. For a list of the NPU's and the neighborhoods they include, see:

www.bit.ly/ATLNPU

ATLANTA PLANNING ADVISORY BOARD

Each NPU sends a representative to the Atlanta Planning Advisory Board, which is a citywide entity created in tandem with the NPU system. The Advisory Board addresses issues of citywide concern, including Comprehensive Development Plans, land use, zoning, transportation, the environment, and more. It submits recommendations to the City Council or the Mayor (depending on the issue) and makes appointments to City Commissions and Boards.

<http://www.atlantaga.gov/index.aspx?page=112>

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, OFFICE OF PLANNING

Each NPU is assigned a planning representative from the Department of Planning and Community Development's Office of Planning. Planning officials record votes, answer questions about land use and zoning, and present the items sent by the City of Atlanta for the NPU to review.

www.bit.ly/ATLPlanning

CITY OF ATLANTA GOVERNANCE AND SERVICES

To better understand the City governance structure, departments, and priorities, see The City of Atlanta municipal website:

www.atlantaga.gov

For more information on city services, to learn more about community outreach projects, and for high community issues and crises, call the quality care center of the City of Atlanta, the Mayors Office of Constituent Services :

404-330-6026

www.bit.ly/ATLconstituents

To learn more about the Atlanta Public School's, their structure, leadership, and the specific schools open to students in your neighborhood, contact APS:

404-802-3500

www.atlanta.k12.ga.us

To report problems with flooding, trash and recycling pickup, code enforcement, street lights, traffic signals, damaged roads, and similar issues ATL311:

311

www.atl311.com

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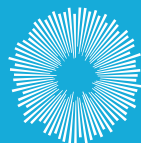
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