

Study Circles + Conference

Description

Study Circles are a small group process where participants meet several times to discuss critical issues, using a structured process. Groups are 8-20 individuals convened by a neutral facilitator. The outcome of the sessions could be combined with a conference where representatives from each study group attend a 1-2 day workshop that brings all their discussions together and work to build consensus.

Advantages

- * Enables groups to work on a schedule that fits them and in a location where they are comfortable.
- * Promotes geographic diversity and safe spaces for BIPOC participants
- * Training conveners will create community capacity for facilitated conversations
- * Groups can cover a wide range of issues and concerns
- * Conference can include a wide cross section of community members and allow cross-pollination of study circles
- * Process supports the identification of collaborative action

Challenges

- Project management , documentation, and accountability across a large number of groups spread out in time and space.
- Recruiting conveners and study circle members
- Adequate support, training, and compensation for conveners.
- Ensuring diversity of opinions in study circles.
- Planning for issues that are unresolved after the concluding conference.
- Cost of managing and executing a conference-size event



Informal Working Groups

Description

Working groups could be created that are a mix of experts and interested members of the public either informally or as subcommittees of the Planning and Zoning Commissions. Groups could be topical or geographic or a combination of both. Neutral facilitation needed for each group.

Advantages

- * Familiar and understood process
- * Could include members of existing commissions (1 or 2 per working group) and other invited participants
- * Could combined expertise on specific topics and neighborhoods in the Region

Challenges

- More work for commissioners and established volunteers
- Does not always result in consensus or buy in from the wider community.
- Group make-up, mission and role must be carefully defined
- Quorum issues can apply
- Formality of Roberts rules may not be comfortable for all participants and may discourage partici-



Citizen Assembly

Description

A deliberative forum made up of demographically representative and randomly selected representatives (usually using a demographically and geographic stratification). The assembly has a Learning phase, a Listening Phase and a deliberation phase. Often assemblies have a process similar to legislative bodies in introducing bills or motions that are developed in small groups and then presented to the broader assembly for vote. The outcome of the assembly is presented to the actual elected body for endorsement. This technique is uncommon in the United States and used more often in United Kingdom, Canada and Australia.

Advantages

- * Ensures representation is similar to the population of the region.
- * Does not use power, connection, or resources to determine membership.
- * Any interest group or commission can present to the assembly and the assembly can call on experts for advice
- * Well informed and facilitated process

Challenges

- Compensation is an essential element of a citizen assembly to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate.
- Includes a lot of participants and will require staff resources for coordination, scheduling, tracking attendance, compensation, etc.
- There may be a limited number of consultants that work in the US and can execute this process.
- If elected officials are not fully committed to fair and open consideration of the assembly outcomes, then it can hurt trust in the process.



Plan Ambassadors + Panel

Description

Ambassadors are individuals who commit to following the process closely and sharing what they know within their community of influence. Ambassadors could agree to also serve on panels to help deliberate specific topics. When a trade-off or difficult topic needs a review, ambassadors can pull in community members to be part of the discussion and provide feedback. They can also gather opinions from their community and bring them to the process.

Advantages

- * Very flexible and takes advantage of willing volunteers.
- * Ambassadors can commit to providing what and who they know best to the process and keep staff informed of community needs and perceptions.
- * Ambassadors can be a low cost way to add capacity to the project team.
- * Formation of ad hoc panels can provide flexibility and be responsive.

Challenges

- Perception of individual bias and bias about who is included must be monitored and responded to.
- Ambassadors are not committed to finding agreement necessarily.
- Identification of issues and the timing of forming ad hoc panels can slow the process down and it can be difficult to ensure representative participation.
- Flexibility can make it difficult to scope a contract and price it correctly.

