

# Partnership for Public Service Concept Paper: PPCE Evidence Challenge

(Resource created in 2024)

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## Background

Public participation and community engagement (PPCE) are vital components of a democratic government, enabling a society and a government that is transparent, focuses on accountability, and models inclusivity.<sup>i</sup> Effective PPCE leads to better meeting the needs of the public and overall improvement of delivering programs.<sup>ii</sup> If designed or implemented poorly, PPCE can lead to protests, public discontent, and even erode trust in government.<sup>iii</sup>

Ongoing systems and structures lead to persistent inequities in representation and participation in public engagement activities.<sup>iv</sup> Research has found that 44% of individuals earning \$80,000 participate in civic engagement by attending local meetings compared to 31% of individuals earning \$40,000 or less.<sup>v</sup> However, if designed intentionally to engage key groups thoughtfully, PPCE may provide individuals with more agency over their own situation<sup>vi</sup> which could lead to increased trust in previously disenfranchised groups.

Ensuring the success of PPCE initiatives hinges on adhering to several key guiding principles. The EPA summarizes several key guiding components including the need for a clear purpose and goal to set realistic expectations and there needs to be a commitment to engaging with the process.<sup>vii</sup> There also needs to be clearly defined structure and process that enable the public input to have real inclusion in the final decision.

The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) identifies five levels of engagement for the public in PPCE: inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower.<sup>viii</sup> Each of these five levels requires different expectations to be set and approaches to be used. For example, “inform” provides the public with information and awareness, while “empower” gives the public the lead for implementation as the final decision-making authority.

IAP2 also emphasizes seven core values to set expectations and engage in successful PPCE processes: 1. Those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process; 2. Implicit in the process is a commitment to the public’s input being included in the decision; 3. The needs of all participants, including decision-makers, are included; 4. The process is designed to engage those that may be affected by the decision; 5. The public is involved in designing the engagement process; 6. Information needed to participate effectively is provided to the public; 7. The public is informed how their input affected the decision.

Using a variety of technology platforms and options for PPCE can engage a more diverse audience, allow deeper discussions, enable more active participation, improve transparency, reduce costs, and improve accessibility.<sup>ix</sup> Integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into PPCE can be an effective and efficient approach by leveraging both human and computer expertise.<sup>x</sup> Additionally, the effective use of AI can support consensus building and enable asynchronous and multiple location public participation.<sup>xi</sup>

## Guidance for Evaluation Planning

Evaluations are a crucial tool to continue to improve the PPCE, which can lead to better public engagement in the future.<sup>xii</sup> Successful evaluations should follow general guidelines and best practices for any evaluation<sup>xiii</sup>. Many evaluations of PPCE rely on subjective methods of evaluation, but following a simple, multi-step process can lead to more objective findings.<sup>xiv</sup> First, evaluations should define what is meant by effectiveness for your specific PPCE effort. To narrow the definition and ensure it is measurable, it can be helpful to focus on the levels of engagement, i.e. inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower, and identify some key measures. Some examples are provided below:

Level of engagement	Measure of effectiveness: Public/Community	Staff
<b>Inform</b>	Participants are aware of the program or decision	Staff clearly communicate.
<b>Consult</b>	Participants were able to provide their feedback on the program or decision	Staff clearly communicate how the feedback was incorporated.
<b>Involve</b>	Participants were able to provide feedback throughout and understand how it influenced the final decision	Staff provide clear updates on the process and decision.
<b>Collaborate</b>	Participants actively partnered with the government on the program or decision including developing alternative solutions	Staff effectively collaborate.
<b>Empower</b>	Participants led the implementation of the program or decision	Staff effectively enable the public to lead on the implementation.

You will want to include embedded evaluation items for the public/community and the agency/staff involved. Some key items could include demographics, measures of trust, measures of inclusion and accessibility, and an open-ended opportunity to identify program improvements.<sup>xv</sup>

An effective, efficient, cost-effective and meaningful way to plan evaluation is to embed it into the PPCE activities. Examples of this include social media<sup>xvi</sup>, web-based discussion and integration of AI<sup>xvii</sup>, ballots, public meeting notes, participatory budgeting, online polls, and others.<sup>xviii</sup>

We suggest following some of the general guidelines below to ensure your evaluation plan meets your specific PPCE needs.

Level of Engagement	Key PPCE Activities	Options to Embed Evaluation
<b>Inform</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leaflets, posters, other informational items</li> <li>Social media postings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>QR code on flyer to track use of the informational materials</li> <li>Website/social media analytics</li> <li>Counts of informational materials distributed</li> </ul>
<b>Consult</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presentations or exhibitions</li> </ul>	All of the items from Inform, plus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flip charts/virtual white boards</li> <li>AI assisted notes from meeting</li> </ul>

<b>Involve</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meetings or workshops</li> </ul>	All items from Inform and Consult, plus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participant worksheets</li> <li>Short meeting polls conducted in real-time</li> </ul>
<b>Collaborate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Web-based and asynchronous collaboration platforms</li> <li>Photo voice</li> </ul>	All items from Inform, Consult and Involve, plus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Web analytics</li> <li>Collaborative document</li> <li>Pictures/video themes</li> </ul>
<b>Empower</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community forums and action planning sessions</li> </ul>	All items from previous levels of engagement, plus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action plan document</li> </ul>

## Guiding Framework

### Key questions to address:

- How to increase awareness of PPCE opportunities among members of affected communities/underrepresented demographics?
- What motivators and barriers to PPCE exist and how to build on and/or mitigate them?
- How does participating in PPCE opportunities affect perceptions of Federal program or policy decisions and the leaders or agencies who make and implement them?
- What measures, data sources, and analytic methods provide actionable information about the effectiveness of PPCE approaches?

### Output and outcome measures.

Outputs and outcomes are critical to achieving desired goals. They make it possible to track progress and allow for intermediate assessments and adjustments. The difference is that outputs are the products, goods and/or services which result from an intervention, and they are designed to produce short- to medium term effects, or outcomes and eventually impacts – the long-lasting effects of the intervention.

Below are tables of outcomes, outputs, and key activities to describe the effects of the initiatives and the resulting changes that can be achieved and evaluated. The purpose of the tables is to provide agencies with a menu of evaluation tools/key questions to determine if their process of developing and implementing their effort to involve the public in programming is indeed participatory in nature and to measure impact.

In these tables we have focused on a broad plan to reveal what causes what, and in what order. These broad questions are selected because they show the full spectrum of effects across our guiding framework and key questions to address. These questions and components can be streamlined depending on the level of public engagement, complexity of the program and resources available for the engagements.

This table focuses on increasing awareness of PPCE among members of affected communities and underrepresented demographics.

Inputs	Outputs		Outcomes
	Activities	Outputs	
What we invest	What we do/Questions to ask	What we produce	What is the result/change
Staff  Funding	<p><b>Conducting situation assessment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The agency should clarify the problem (what is the challenge they are trying to address?)</li> <li>Define roles and responsibilities (who is responsible for making what decisions?)</li> <li>Identify who (communities) being affected by the interventions.</li> <li>Decide/define the level of public participation that the agency is expecting (inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower).</li> </ul> <p><b>Selecting the level of public participation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the goals of public participation?</li> <li>How much resources can be allocated to this effort?</li> <li>How much influence will the public have over the final decision?</li> </ul> <p><b>Identifying relevant groups</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who will be directly affected by the intervention?</li> <li>Who will be indirectly affected by the intervention?</li> <li>Who is already engaged or has contacted us regarding this issue?</li> <li>Who can claim a legal standing (legal rights to...) that would be affected by the decision /interventions?</li> <li>Who is committed to the various interest groups, such as community groups or business groups, and will be responsible for acting as liaison and leader?</li> <li>Who will be responsible for implementing the decision?</li> </ul> <p><b>Preparing for the participatory process</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How many participants can be involved?</li> <li>How much will it cost to conduct the participatory process?</li> <li>How long will it take to conduct the participatory process?</li> <li>Match the participatory method to the desired outcomes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear understanding of how the agency is defining the problem.</li> <li>Identification of "who" has final say or deciding authority.</li> <li>A preliminary list of individuals who may participate in the decision.</li> <li>Identification of the resources needed to conduct public participation.</li> <li>Clear understanding of how the information will be used.</li> <li>Identification of the level of participation.</li> <li>List of relevant groups who need to be engaged.</li> <li>List of relevant groups who are already engaged and can be a resource to the agency.</li> <li>List of liaisons/ resources the agency can refer to.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Short term outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All relevant groups and communities agree on the problem.</li> <li>Resources are allocated equitably.</li> <li>A comprehensive list of relevant groups.</li> <li>List of methods/approaches to be used for the participatory process.</li> </ul> <p><b>Medium term outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Buy in from public and relevant groups.</li> <li>Agency does not overpromise participants about the influence they might have on the final decisions.</li> <li>Agency is better prepared to conduct the participatory process.</li> </ul> <p><b>Long term outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effective public participation process is designed.</li> <li>Participants are satisfied with the process and outcomes.</li> <li>The full range of perspectives needed to conduct meaningful public participation is achieved.</li> </ul> <p><b>Impact</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build trust among the participants and the agency.</li> <li>Conducting a participatory process that enables people/communities to influence the decisions and actions that affect their lives.</li> </ul>

This table focuses on the various barriers to PPCE and motivators to overcome the barriers.

Inputs	Outputs		Outcomes
	Activities	Outputs	
Staff  Funding	<p><b>Identifying barriers to public participation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the outreach methods being used to create awareness?</li> <li>• Are the outreach methods reaching the intended audiences/communities?</li> </ul> <p><b>Access to information</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is the information being provided?</li> <li>• If print, is the information legible?</li> <li>• Does the text need to be interpreted in another language/braille?</li> <li>• Is the text in plain language?</li> <li>• If electronic, does all partners have access to the internet?</li> <li>• Is the website accessible and easy to navigate?</li> </ul> <p><b>Meetings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the meeting location accessible by all?</li> <li>• Is it expensive to travel to the meeting location?</li> <li>• Is the meeting set for a convenient time?</li> <li>• If the meeting is online, does all participants have access to reliable internet?</li> <li>• Is the meeting format culturally sensitive and appropriate?</li> </ul> <p><b>Trust building</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the agency staff (not from the community), learned about and sensitive to the historical and current trauma that communities have faced?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• List of all the outreach methods being used.</li> <li>• Prints, visuals.</li> <li>• Prints in large font sizes with appropriate fonts.</li> <li>• Text in multiple languages.</li> <li>• Readable text.</li> <li>• Assessable meeting location.</li> <li>• Travel cost reimbursement (if necessary).</li> </ul>	<p><b>Short term outcome</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of the barriers that individuals or communities face during participation.</li> <li>• All communication material is accessible.</li> <li>• Meetings are accessible to all.</li> </ul> <p><b>Medium term outcome</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking measures to address the barriers.</li> <li>• Participants feel welcomed to the meeting.</li> </ul> <p><b>Long term outcome</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alleviating barriers to public participation.</li> <li>• All participants are fully aware of and understand what is being communicated.</li> <li>• Effective participation by individuals and community members.</li> <li>• Build trust among the participants and the agency.</li> </ul>

This table focuses on the current perception of federal government, agencies, and leaders. It also explores the ways to improve present perceptions of the public/communities involved in the PPCE.

Inputs	Outputs		Outcomes
	<i>Activities</i>	<i>Outputs</i>	
Staff  Funding	<b>Understanding existing perceptions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do individuals /communities view the federal government (can be repeated for agency, agency leaders)? - favorably or unfavorably</li> <li>• If unfavorable, what is the reasons/cause of this opinion? (lack of awareness, distrust, nationalism etc.)</li> <li>• Are there any activity/activities that affect the views more than others? (e.g. CX, technology etc.)</li> <li>• Is there a difference in perception by demographics? (Age, race/ethnicity, geographical location etc.)</li> <li>• What are some areas that individuals and communities want the federal government/agencies to improve?</li> <li>• What are some actionable things the federal government/agencies can do to improve in those areas?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of how communities/individuals view the federal government.</li> <li>• Understanding the reason behind unfavorable views.</li> <li>• Activities that can improve trust/perception about the federal government.</li> <li>• Understanding if there are differences in perception based on demographics.</li> </ul>	<b>Long term outcome</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changing perception of federal government</li> <li>• Increasing trust in federal institutions</li> </ul>

According to the 2023 Partnership for Public Service survey on trust in government, only about 1 in 5 Americans believe that the Federal Government “listens to the public” or “is transparent.”<sup>xix</sup> However, while trust in the federal government is low, civil servants and federal agencies are viewed more positively. This is a cause for hope, and public participation and community engagement with the federal agencies offer a unique opportunity to reset the relationship between our government and the communities it serves. If we are selected as finalists, our toolkit would include a simple tool that agencies could use to rigorously evaluate and continually improve the effectiveness of their PPCE activities.

## Strategies to collect and analyze the data.

The goal for collecting and analyzing data is to contribute to a shared evidence base that can inform continual improvement and refinement of effective and equitable PPCE across the government.

Before collecting and analyzing the data, here are some questions to consider when trying to understand what measures, data sources, and analytic methods provide actionable information about the relative effectiveness of PPCE.

For Agencies	For Public/Communities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Were the goals of the PPCE clear?</li> <li>• Were those milestones achieved? If not, what measures were taken to overcome challenges?</li> <li>• Were clear milestones set before starting a new phase of the project?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Were individuals and communities clear about their roles and responsibilities?</li> <li>• Were individuals and communities clear about which part of the policy their opinion could/could not influence?</li> <li>• Were access barriers to participation addressed by the agency?</li> <li>• Was the engagement process successful?</li> </ul>

Below we highlight some suggested strategies to collect and analyze data on PPCE programs that are broad enough to provide guidance for government-wide efforts. If we are selected as finalists, our toolkit would include a simple tool to select your level of approach, answer some other key questions about key activities, budget, and time available, and we will then provide the recommendation and resources for the suggested tool(s) to use for the specific use case.

Level of Approach	Collection	Analysis	Budget	Time/Scope
<b>Inform</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• QR code on flyer to track use of the informational materials</li> <li>• Website/social media analytics</li> <li>• Counts of informational materials distributed</li> </ul>	Simple dashboard with counts displayed on agency webpage or intranet	Minimal	Minimal
<b>Consult</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flip charts/virtual white boards</li> <li>• AI assisted notes from meeting</li> </ul>	Summary of key themes  Dashboard of relevant meeting metrics	Minimal to Moderate  Budget will depend on level of AI assistance vs human hours	Minimal to Moderate
<b>Involve</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant worksheets</li> </ul>	Summary of key themes  Dashboard of poll results displayed on	Minimal to Moderate  Budget will depend on level of AI assistance vs human hours and	Minimal to Moderate

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Short meeting polls conducted in real-time</li> </ul>	agency webpage or intranet	complexity of meeting poll questions	
<b>Collaborate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Web-based and asynchronous collaboration platforms</li> <li>Short meeting polls conducted in real-time</li> <li>Photo voice</li> </ul>	Summary of key themes  Journey map/photo montage  Dashboard of relevant meeting metrics	Moderate  Budget will depend on level of AI assistance vs human hours and length/number of videos/photos	Minimal to Moderate
<b>Empower</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community forums and action planning sessions</li> <li>Short meeting polls conducted in real-time</li> <li>Photo voice</li> </ul>	Completed action plan  Journey map/photo montage  Dashboard of relevant meeting metrics	Moderate  Budget will depend on level of AI assistance vs human hours and length/length/number of videos/photos and action plan	Moderate

In conclusion, PPCE is a fundamental opportunity to include voices of people with different lived experiences to improve programs and policies directly impacting them (the public), change perceptions and increase trust in the federal government. We believe that the methods we presented above enable agencies to evaluate the effectiveness of their PPCE efforts to better understand the needs of their communities/the public, and thereby better achieve the goals of improving inclusivity, reach, and promoting public involvement and trust in Federal decision-making.

<sup>i</sup> Rijal, S. (2023). The Importance of Community Involvement in Public Management Planning and Decision-Making Processes. *Journal of Contemporary Administration and Management (ADMAN)*, 1(2), 84-92.

<sup>ii</sup> Madzivhandila, T. S., & Maloka, C. M. (2014). Community participation in local government planning processes: A paramount step towards a successful service delivery. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(16), 652-657.

<sup>iii</sup> Abas, A., Arifin, K., Ali, M. A. M., & Khairil, M. (2023). A systematic literature review on public participation in decision-making for local authority planning: A decade of progress and challenges. *Environmental Development*, 100853.

<sup>iv</sup> Uslaner, E. M. (2003). Civic engagement in America: Why people participate in political and social life. *Report to the Knight Civic Engagement Project, co-directed by The Democracy Collaborative, University of Maryland-College Park and the Center for the Study of Voluntary Organizations and Service, Georgetown University.*

<sup>v</sup> Ramakrishnan, S. K., & Baldassare, M. (2004). The ties that bind: Changing demographics and civic engagement in California. Public Policy Inst. of CA.

<sup>vi</sup> Madzivhandila, T. S., & Maloka, C. M. (2014). Community participation in local government planning processes: A paramount step towards a successful service delivery. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(16), 652-657.

<sup>vii</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/international-cooperation/public-participation-guide-introduction-public-participation>

<sup>viii</sup> IAP2: [https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/communications/11x17\\_p2\\_pillars\\_brochure\\_20.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/communications/11x17_p2_pillars_brochure_20.pdf)

<sup>ix</sup> Suherlan, S. (2023). Digital Technology Transformation in Enhancing Public Participation in Democratic Processes. *Technology and Society Perspectives (TACIT)*, 1(1), 10-17.

<sup>x</sup> Zheng, Y., Lin, Y., Zhao, L., Wu, T., Jin, D., & Li, Y. (2023). Spatial planning of urban communities via deep reinforcement learning. *Nature computational science*, 3(9), 748-762. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43588-023-00503-5>

<sup>xi</sup> Sahab, S., Haqbeen, J., & Ito, T. (2023). Facilitating Collaborative Consensus Building in Web-based Discussion through Collective Task-Based Roles: A Case Study. *IIAI Letters on Informatics and Interdisciplinary Research*, 4.

<sup>xii</sup> EPA: <https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2015-09/documents/evaluate508.pdf>

<sup>xiii</sup> American Evaluation Association. Guiding Principles for Evaluators. <https://www.eval.org/About/Guiding-Principles#:~:text=The%20five%20Principles%20address%20systematic,how%20they%20justify%20professional%20actions.>

<sup>xiv</sup> Rowe, G., & Frewer, L. J. (2004). Evaluating public-participation exercises: a research agenda. *Science, technology, & human values*, 29(4), 512-556.

<sup>xv</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2019. Measuring the Effectiveness of Public Involvement in Transportation Planning and Project Development. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25447>.

<sup>xvi</sup> Kausar, M., & Zulfiqar, M. U. (2024). Assessment of Public Participation Modalities through Social Media Platforms for Approval of Private Housing Schemes: Case Studies under LDA Lahore, Pakistan.

<sup>xvii</sup> Sahab, S., Haqbeen, J., & Ito, T. (2023). Facilitating Collaborative Consensus Building in Web-based Discussion through Collective Task-Based Roles: A Case Study. *IIAI Letters on Informatics and Interdisciplinary Research*, 4.

<sup>xviii</sup> Smith, G. (2005). Power Beyond the Ballot: 57 democratic innovations from around the world, Power Inquiry, May.

<sup>xix</sup> Partnership for Public Service. (2023). [The State of Public Trust in Government 2023](#).