CIVX

METRICS TOOLKIT

TOOLS FOR RESEARCHERS, CIVIL SOCIETY AND GOVERNMENTS
TO MEASURE AND OPTIMIZE FOR "CIVIC EXPERIENCE"

by:

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POPVOX FOUNDATION

MADE POSSIBLE WITH SUPPORT FROM

WILLIAM + FLORA Hewlett Foundation

democracy fund

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OVERVIEW

Organizations use various metrics to evaluate the "experience" of individuals who engage with their services. Since the 1990s, the public sector has increasingly adopted practices developed in the commercial context to evaluate "customer experience" or "CX," focusing on the ease, efficiency, and effectiveness of transactional services and the satisfaction that individuals feel with those transactions.

However, the concept of "citizen as customer," misses key characteristics of engagement by "the People" in a democracy. Individuals engaging with their government are not simply customers — they are partners, stakeholders, citizens, investors, and so much more. Depending on the context, people interact with government to vindicate rights, guide the direction of their communities, and to protect and preserve their livelihoods. These interactions are not just transactional but transformational. Traditional CX metrics alone are insufficient to measure the complexity of those experiences.

Increasing the efficiency and ease of interacting with government services is without question a very good thing. However, an exclusive focus on CX optimization without a broader consideration of civic efficacy and access may exacerbate historical inequalities. In some cases, a narrow CX approach can fail to acknowledge that some "customers" have more influence than others in a governing system. CX practices may privilege those who have more influence, more experience, or who trust the government more at the expense of those who are historically or currently underserved. As CX practices become more prevalent in government, it is important to assess the impact of this strategy on other priorities, including advancing equity and support for underserved communities.

We believe that the strides made over the past several decades in introducing CX concepts and methods for measuring the "experience" of those interacting with government provide a solid foundation for what could become an expanded practice of assessing and optimizing for the needs of members of historically or currently underserved communities.

This toolkit introduces the concept of "Civic Experience" or "CivX" metrics that incorporate values like civic empowerment, equity, efficacy, and inclusion. A "CivX" approach views people not simply as customers who need to be satisfied within the context of a single interaction or service but as contributors with power and agency over institutions that affect their everyday lives and the lives of others within their communities.

A "CivX" approach views people not simply as customers who need to be satisfied within the context of a single interaction or service, but as contributors with power and agency over institutions that affect their everyday lives and the lives of others within their communities.

The CivX approach invites agencies to consider interactions between individuals and government not in isolation but as part of a larger experience of the individual in one of their many "roles" — as constituent, customer, partner, citizen, and more.

We believe that a set of relatively straightforward and universal metrics to evaluate the civic experience can make it easier for governing institutions to adopt a CivX framework and raise the floor for civic experience across governing institutions.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

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In this toolkit, we present eight metric themes for civic engagement. Each metric offers a questions that organizations should ask themselves when evaluating their civic processes.

Balancing Internal and External Measures

The metrics outlined in this toolkit include both internal and external methods for evaluation. In some cases, we offer survey questions to ask external individuals. In other cases, we offer self-reflective questions for governing institutions and internal metrics for evaluations.

Balancing Quantitative and Quantitative Measures

The toolkit offers both quantitative and qualitative questions to evaluate civic engagement. It is important for organizations to carefully consider which method is appropriate to capture metrics for their context.

Each method has limitations. For example, surveys can be riddled with biases such as social desirability bias. When people are asked to self-describe their experiences, they might not describe how they actually feel, but rather how they expect others to *want* them to feel. The order and wording of questions can also play a significant role in response outcomes, as certain words and phrases can trigger certain images and emotions for each respondent. On the flip-side, qualitative metrics do not provide scale or ease for large-scale comparison, which may be important for understanding wider trends. For these reasons, it is important to pay careful attention to which metric methods are used and when certain qualitative and quantitative metrics are appropriate.

We recognize that these metrics are not all-encompassing and encourage active feedback on this toolkit. It is intended as a living, changing document that will continuously evolve to meet the needs of the civic and governing community.

CIVXMETRICS

EIGHT STEPS TO MEASURE AND OPTIMIZE FOR "CIVIC EXPERIENCE"

1. **PEOPLE**
   Identifying and recruiting participants, evaluating turnout, demographics

2. **CIVIC KNOWLEDGE**
   Civic competency, knowledge presentation, setting expectations

3. **WAYFINDING**
   Discovery, usability, orientation

4. **COLLECTIVE EMPOWERMENT**
   Empathy, inclusion, respect, free expression

5. **EFFICACY**
   Internal and external political efficacy, government efficacy

6. **TRUST**
   Trust in actions and information; trust *through* actions

7. **CLOSING THE LOOP**
   Follow-through and thanks

8. **REOPENING THE LOOP**
   Opportunities for future engagement

POPVOX FOUNDATION

1

PEOPLE

Identifying and recruiting participants, evaluating turnout, demographics

People are central to any civic process. It is important to understand who participates and who does not participate to evaluate the equity and inclusiveness of civic processes, and ultimately to make good governance decisions.

Identifying Stakeholders and Key Populations

WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE?

Individuals engage with government for many different reasons. In some cases they are accessing services. In other cases, they wish to impact policy outcomes or to share their thoughts. Sometimes a government or civic entity actively invites or recruits engagement from specific communities.

Government agencies and civic organizations should start evaluations by listing all potential stakeholders in the civic process. Who has a stake in the outcomes of that engagement? Which communities, organizations, businesses need to be part of the process?

There are legal reasons for specific populations to be targeted in some cases — as when a local planning department provides notice to residents within a certain radius of a proposed development project. In other cases, those who engage fit programmatic profiles — whether small business owners who seek grants from the Small Business Administration, people over age 65 accessing Social Security or Medicare, and those who previously served in the military who access benefits through the Veteran's Administration. And still in other cases, the government entity may be instructed in statute or by political leadership to engage specific populations, whether to raise awareness or garner input from those who might be particularly impacted by proposed policies.

As the government entity evaluates the legal, regulatory, and administrative requirements in designing processes or opportunities for engagement, the organization may ask:

- **Who** needs to engage in these processes?
- **Which communities** will be most affected by the outcomes of the civic process?

Thinking outside the box

Identifying stakeholders can be hard. Try thinking outside the box, looking for any and all persons that could have a stake in the outcomes.

Evaluating Recruitment Strategies

WHO IS INVITED AND HOW?

"Recruitment," notice, or other outreach occurs in one form or another for most engagement opportunities — except for things like tax deadlines that come due at the same time every year. This includes legal notices in local papers for public meetings, emails or text messages inviting participation in a town hall event, and social media announcements or community discussions.

Outreach efforts should align with the list of stakeholders, meaning that all forms of recruitment, advertising, and other forms of notice should attempt to reach the primary stakeholders.

Invitations can have a powerful influence over participation and are among the single largest predictors of someone showing up to any non-electoral civic process. Invitations convey respect and give people a sense of confidence that they were chosen as valuable stakeholders in a process.

Trusted mediators also play an important role in recruitment. Community leaders, local news networks, and family/friends are all spectacular disseminators of information and recruiters for events. Government should take advantage of these mediators.

The government entity planning outreach and invitation strategy should consider:

- **What are the legal or regulatory notice requirements for this engagement or service opportunity?**
- **Would this process benefit from active recruitment or invitation beyond the legal minimum?**
- **If active recruitment is employed, what methods are used and why?**
- **Do these recruitment processes target the primary stakeholders of these civic processes?**

Outreach options

- ✓ Random and representative sampling
- ✓ Oversampling impacted communities or traditionally underserved populations
- ✓ Community-centered outreach, such as partnering with trusted organizations such as local news outlets or faith-based organizations

Evaluating Turnout, Engagement and Uptake

Once people engage with government services or in a civic process, it is important to evaluate who showed up — and who didn't. It will come as no surprise that many civic engagement practices draw participant groups that mirror the inequalities in broader society, unless this is explicitly mitigated. Governing organizations should ask questions like:

- **Were impacted populations represented in policy or rule-making discussions?**
- **If a service is geared toward a certain population or income level, do registration or uptake numbers correlate with demographic data?**

Civic institutions should evaluate three key markers of turnout in a civic process: **process engagement, previous engagement, and demographics**.

1. DEMOGRAPHICS

WHO SHOWED UP OR ENROLLED? HOW DO THEY IDENTIFY?

Demographic information can help civic institutions pinpoint the dominant and non-dominant groups of attendees or participants and identify gaps in outreach or messaging. These may include variables such as age, education, gender, income, geographic location, and ethnicity. In addition, collective identifiers such as group affiliation can help illustrate broader community involvement. For example, are the participants in a school board meeting part of the teachers union? Are co-signatories of this letter to their Member of Congress part of the district's environmental group? Are public comments on regulation predominantly from lobbyist groups? Groups affiliations can significantly influence individuals' attendance and motivations.

We suggest collecting no more information than what is truly needed and exercising extra sensitivity on questions of race, gender, and sexuality. Where possible, identity questions should allow an opt-out or the option to self-describe their identification. For example, ethnicity is often not easily distilled to one option. Individuals should be able to "check all that apply" or offer their own description. In some cases, it may not be appropriate at all to collect demographic information, especially when a governing institution is doing the asking. Although this information is useful, demographics should only be collected and evaluated in appropriate instances.

Collecting this information does not have to done in a survey. Rather, collecting identify measures can be part of the civic process and dialogue. For example, government agencies can host round-table discussions, asking people about their personal experiences and feedback with an agency process. They can conduct ethnographic work and interviews to uncover this information in a less regimented setting.

2. CIVIC PROCESS ENGAGEMENT

HOW DID PARTICIPANTS ENGAGE?

By evaluating *how* people engaged, organizations and governing institutions can gauge the effectiveness and accessibility of the engagement processes or services.

There are many ways to define how a person or community engaged, and those definitions will change for every civic process. Some general questions to ask include:

- **What kinds of participation happened?**
- **Was this participation expected?**
- **Were levels of engagement different across different stakeholder groups?**
- **Was there engagement from those beyond the "usual suspects"?**

The modes of engagement used by the governing institution can also influence the kinds of people and communities who engage. Governments and organizations should compare engagements across different civic processes and events to determine if the engagement itself is influencing who attends and what kinds of actions take place. For example, do online engagements bring about differing kinds of participation than offline engagements? Do more people sign-up from unemployment benefits after attending a seminar about unemployment assistance?

Evaluating Turnout, Engagement and Uptake

3. PREVIOUS ENGAGEMENT

HAVE THEY ENGAGED BEFORE?

Understanding previous engagement with government or civic activities can help institutions evaluate their recruitment strategies to see if they are reaching underserved communities and reaching previously unengaged people.

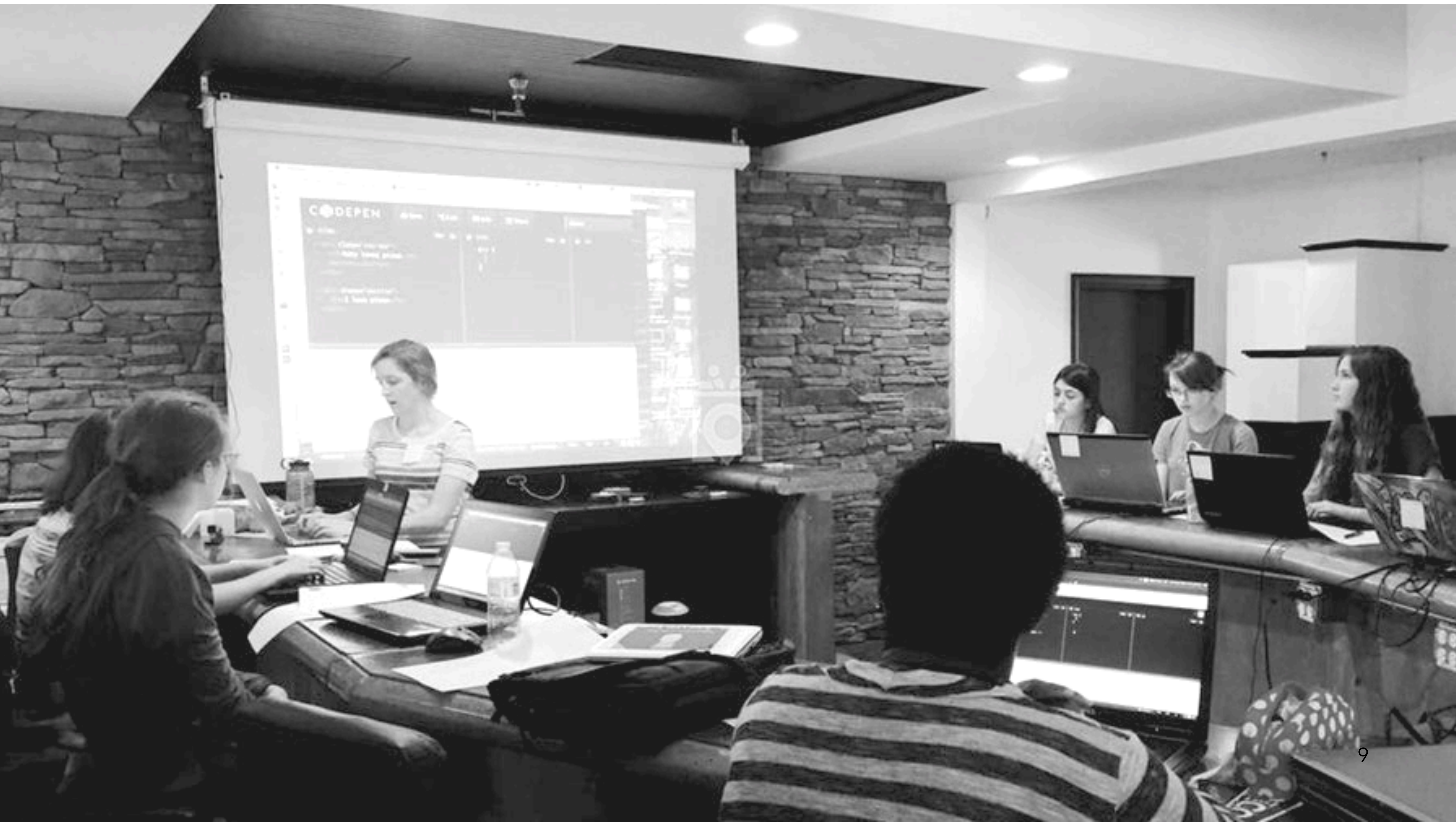
- **What kinds of engagement with government did a person have prior to this process?**
- **Have they enrolled or received benefits from other agencies?**
- **Have they been active in civic activities over the years (e.g., voting, protest, contacting a representative)?**

By comparing levels of engagement against other measures like demographics, civic organizations and institutions can evaluate whether certain engagement processes inhibit or promote engagement.

Questions about previous civic engagement may not be appropriate in some cases. (It is not advised, for example, for government entities to ask specifically about First Amendment activities such as voting or protest, but rather to refer generally to civic or community engagement.) Nonetheless, these questions are frequently used within political science domains to understand individuals' comfort engaging with government, and such questions continue to be useful for understand civic engagement practices. Questions like the ones used by Gil de Zúñiga et al., inquire about a person's overall political engagement:

- *Did you vote in the most recent election (local, statewide, or federal)?*
- *Have you attended a political rally in the last 12 months?*
- *Have you attended a protest of any kind in the last 12 months?*
- *Have you donated money to a campaign or political cause in the last 12 months?*
- *Have you participated in groups that took any local action for social or political reform?*
- *Have you been involved in public interest groups, political action groups, political clubs, political campaigns, or political party committees?*

Photo credit: theCO



2 CIVIC KNOWLEDGE

Civic competency, knowledge presentation, and setting expectations

A baseline of knowledge about a civic process or government service improves the effectiveness of public engagement, and it's up to the organization providing a service or hosting a processes to ensure that this basic information is clear and accessible. Citizens don't have to be experts to offer valuable input. And they have a right to access services to which they are entitled.

Governing organizations should never assume that public access to information and resources equates to public awareness and empowerment to use that information and resources. Just making information publicly accessible is not enough.

Just making information publicly accessible is not enough.

We identified two components for evaluating civic knowledge: **civic competency** and **information presentation**.

Civic Competency

WHAT DO PARTICIPANTS NEED TO KNOW?

New Public's "Civic Signals" research defines "Civic Competence" as the awareness of how people perform their role in democracy. The project offers these steps for identifying the competency needed for a specific engagement or activity:

1. Identify the task that requires civic competence (e.g., casting a ballot, contacting an agency, etc.)
2. Determine the types of knowledge and information necessary for that particular civic competence
3. Identify what individual measures are necessary, and what are sufficient, for the overall index.
4. Use the knowledge definition to write justification for the inclusion and weighing of each measure.

Information Presentation

HOW DO PEOPLE FIND WHAT THEY NEED TO KNOW?

Information presentation can have a significant impact on a person's trust and feelings of empowerment in the civic process. Governing organizations should ask themselves:

- **Does the process provide easy-to-read, balanced, factual, material that is accessible to all participants?**

Effective knowledge presentation also considers the importance of clear language. The Plain Language Association International (PLAIN) provides resources for adopting and evaluating plain language. 18F has also created an inclusive language guide for federal agencies.

Another important consideration is who is presenting the information. Depending on programmatic goals, agencies may consider: topic experts, trusted third parties or skilled communicators.

Civic Knowledge Example: School Board Meeting

A local school board runs bi-monthly public meetings. In an upcoming meeting, the board will discuss the issue of teacher salaries with the public. The board wants to evaluate whether their public meeting provides a satisfactory level of information to empower people to take part in the discussion of teacher salaries.

Civic Competency:

1. **Identify the task or issue**: Participating in a school board meeting to comment on teacher salaries
2. **Determine the types of knowledge necessary**: Knowledge of board meetings details (e.g., meeting time/date/location, meeting agenda); knowledge of teacher salaries (e.g., historical and current salary rates, local school budgets); knowledge of political debates on salaries(e.g., arguments from the teacher's union, arguments by the school board); knowledge of school board's role (e.g., What power do school boards have? What mechanisms keep school board members accountable?)
3. **Identify what individual measures are necessary**: In this instance, the board will focus on the measuring the knowledge of political debates on teachers salaries:
    - What is the current average teacher salary?
    - What do various stakeholders want? (e.g.,Teachers' unions, PTA, school administrators' recommendations)
    - What would be the cost of increasing teacher salaries? Who would pay for it?
    - Who has the authority to change those salaries and what kind of process do it require?
4. **Provide justifications for various potential courses of action**: Attendees should be provided with the basic salary figures and the community opportunities/consequences for increasing/decrease teacher's salary.

Setting Expectations

WHAT SHOULD PEOPLE EXPECT FROM THIS EXPERIENCE?

It is important for governments to set clear expectations of the purpose of the process and the kinds of engagement required to participate. Effective expectations-setting clarifies opportunities and limitations for engagement. It helps avoid confusion between governing institutions and participating communities. Putting everyone on the same page leads to better engagement and better outcomes.

- **Were the goals of the event clear and transparent to participating individuals?**
- **Were any participants confused about the expectations or desired outcomes of the process?**
- **Were the expectations of participating individuals or organizations different than those of the governing institution? Did expectations vary across governing stakeholders and individual stakeholders?**

Setting expectations is related to Civic Competency, in that citizens are expected to have a certain threshold of understanding in order to effectively participate in a civic process. However, those expectations need to be followed with concrete action to ensure each participant within the process can achieve those expectations. That is why evaluating the level of competency and knowledge presented to individuals is so important.

Civic Knowledge Example: School Board Meeting (continued)

Information Presentation:

1. Consider a Fact Sheet: A brief fact sheet on the topic to be discussed (in this case, teacher's salaries) and decisions to be made can help get participants "on the same page." Effort should be made to make the information avaialable in multiple langages and to people of various abilities. The fact sheet should clearly note how it was prepared and by whom.

This facts sheet should be accessible before the meeting — publicly posted to the school board's website and attached to any invitations or announcements related to the meeting. The facts sheet should also be available at the beginning of the meeting, allowing time for people to absorb the information, whether on paper or in a presentation that is shared.

2. Allow a representative set of stakeholders to speak: School board members, teachers, students, representatives from the teacher's union, financial advisors for the school district, and anyone else who has a stake in a change in teacher salaries should have the opportunity to speak and explain their perspective on the issue to the public. The public should have a chance to submit questions of presenters.

3. Collect feedback on the usability, understandability, and accessibility of the fact sheet: To determine if the information is adequately presented to participating individuals, the school board could test facts sheets with representative samples of the community and ask for input on how the information was presented in ta post-event survey.

Setting Expectations:

Before the meeting begins, the board should clearly present the agenda and expectations for the meeting. This includes the goals of the meeting, the process by which people will discuss teacher's salaries (round tables, speeches to the board, public questions, etc.), and the expectations for final outcomes and what steps after the meeting ends.

The board should also make clear how meeting attendees will impact the discussion and final outcomes of changing teacher's salaries. For example, will the public be able to share their opinion on the matter or only listen to others speak? Will the public be able to decide by vote on the final change in salaries or is that left to the school board?

✓ **Evaluate Feedback:** The school board should ask participants to answer a small survey after the meeting or raise their hands in response to the questions **"Yes or No, I felt like the expectations for this meeting were clear and transparent"**

3

WAYFINDING

Discovery, usability, orientation

People of all experience levels should be able to show up and understand how to engage in civic process with ease. The lower the barrier to entry, the more likely people are able to participate. Wayfinding focuses on the navigational efforts required to understand and engage in a civic process.

Discovery

HOW DO PEOPLE DISCOVER THIS PROCESS?

The beginning of the wayfinding experience could start with a recruitment process, as discussed in the "People" section, or it could begin with self-discovery or external guidance. Understanding how people come to discover a government service or civic process is an important first step in the wayfinding evaluation. Government should ask:

- **Are we making it easy for people to discover the civic process?**

People who enroll or engage in a civic process could be asked:

- **"How did you discover {specify civic process}?"** for the inclusion and weighing of each measure.

The responses from participants can help institutions understand what avenues of discovery and recruitment work best

Usability

ARE PEOPLE ABLE TO EFFECTIVELY PARTICIPATE? ARE THERE DESIGN BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION?

After discovery, people need to be able to move through a process easily. This idea overlaps with discussions in the domain of User-Experience (UX) and design. How people engage in a process can heavily depend on how those experiences are designed. As people navigate through a civic process, the institution should ensure those experiences are easy to discover, understand, and engage with; and they should follow accessibility standards to ensure everyone and participate equally.

The Systems Usability Scale (SUS) is a robust measure of attitudes towards the usability of services using ten questions:

1. I think that I would use {process} frequently
2. I found {process} unnecessarily complex
3. I thought {process} was easy to use
4. I think that I would need the support of a technical person to be able to use {process}
5. I found that the various functions in {specify process} were well integrated
6. I thought that there was too much inconsistency in {process}
7. I would imagine that most people would learn to use {process} very quickly
8. I found {process} awkward to use
9. I felt very confident using {process}
10. I needed to learn a lot of things before I could get going with {process}

Orientation

DO PEOPLE UNDERSTAND WHERE THEY ARE IN THE BROADER CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PROCESS?

Wayfinding includes navigating processes and the journey of understanding those processes in the grand scheme of civic participation. For example, if a person is renewing their driver's license, do they know what department they are talking to and where that department lives in the larger hierarchy of government offices? If a person talks to their state assembly member, do they know which branch of government they are engaging and how that branch interacts with other branches?

Orientation relates to civic knowledge — the knowledge needed for people to participate in a civic process — but it also looks broader at the connections between civic processes. People should be able to given information on where a civic process lies in the structure of the civic institution to further their understanding of how the institution functions and how to orient themselves in various interactions.

A simple way to evaluate for orientation is to ask:

- **Do we help people understand where this civic process lies in the structure of our civic institution?**

Another way to evaluate this metric is to provide opportunities to inform people of the department, branch, agency, or other institution they are engaging with during the civic process.

The goal should be to *provide* orientation, not to insert a challenge or question that could cause a participant or beneficiary to lose confidence in their understanding.

4

COLLECTIVE EMPOWERMENT

Empathy, inclusion, respect, free expression

In interactions with governments and civic organizations, individuals want to know that they matter, that their voice is being heard. Processes should aim for empowerment that cultivates a sense of belonging, builds bridges, and motivates future engagement.

Research from the Centre For Public Impact found that many people feel government interactions are characterized by a lack of humanity and a lack of empathy or authentic engagement. "Humanizing" these interactions — even by demonstrating that "real people" are behind government processes, can strengthen social cohesion and improve the perceived legitimacy of governing institutions.

This section provides suggestions for evaluating opportunities for empowered communication and engagement within governing institutions. Not all of these metrics apply to all forms of engagement. Each provides important food for thought as government agencies and civic organizations evaluate their processes.

Empathy

DOES THE PROCESS CONSIDER THE PERSPECTIVE AND EXPERIENCE OF PARTICIPANTS?

One of the building blocks for empowered communication is what the Creative Reaction Lab's Report of Equity Centered Community Design calls "Building Humility and Empathy." That is, government should actively attempt to understand participants' perspective (empathy) and recognize the influence of their structural biases (humility).

Empathy is a key approach to the human-centered design work mentioned in the section on Wayfinding. It requires governing institutions to metaphorically "step in another's shoes" to understand their perspective when navigating government services and engaging in participatory processes.

Agencies and government organizations should evaluate processes such as town hall and informational meetings, responses to constituent letters and public comments, and requests for information during service enrollment and access with an eye to empathetic communication. This could be addressed in a survey question:

- **During {interaction}, I felt that {specify institutional actors} tried to understand how I was feeling.**

Inclusion

DOES THE PROCESS ENGENDER A SENSE OF BELONGING AMONG PARTICIPANTS?

Ensuring that people of all identities, backgrounds, and abilities can effectively and fully participate on an equitable basis is essential for government processes and civic engagement. Kip Holly at the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity and the Community Development for All People has called for a "radical hospitality" approach to civic processes.

To evaluate whether public processes engender a sense of inclusion, Holly suggests a critical examination of who is represented and who is not — asking those who do not attend or participate why they are absent and what would need to happen to make them feel included.

Governments can promote inclusivity by offering resources to support engagement, especially supporting those who have limitations that physically limit engagement. For example, can town halls offer child care services during meetings? Are there ride-sharing options available for elections?

Inclusive practices consider the authority structures of engagement:

- **Who gets to communicate and make decisions?**
- **Are opportunities to ask questions equitably extended?**
- **Is sufficient time allotted to allow for those who may need extra consideration?**
- **Do decision-makers reflect the diversity of the communities they serve?**
- **Does visual collateral convey that "all are welcome"?**

If a process or engagement is primarily digital, are there "bottlenecks" within the system where participants drop off or appear to have difficulty completing the necessary information? Is it possible to discern patterns in this drop-off that might indicate difficulty associated with language comprehension or technical challenges?

Empower through agenca-setting

One of the strongest ways to empower communities and individuals is to give them agency over the agenda. Governing institutions should make space for stakeholder-driven planning. They should proactively asking individuals and communities to be part of the planning process, and help design and drive the engagement in future civic processes.

Respect

DOES THE PROCESS RESPECT PARTICIPANTS' TIME, ENERGY, AND VALUE?

The time and energy required to engage in civic processes or navigate government services are precious. Government agencies and civic institutions should strive to convey this sense of respect both in the information conveyed and engagement methods. And there is no one-size-fits-all solution. In some cases, an in-person option may provide helpful human contact for discussing difficult questions. In other cases, the convenience of an email or text message allows an individual to participate in a civic activity or address a service need and attend to the other many demands on their time.

A good way to gauge whether participants or beneficiaries feel respected in their interaction is to ask:

- **I felt this engagement was an effective or productive use of my time**
- **I felt that the process respected my time**

The point is to convey respect for people's time and capacity and the value of their contribution. Too often, civic institutions trade on a spirit of civic altruism or civic piety. Individuals are often expected to do the hard work for their communities and governments for free, consigning civic engagement to the "voluntary sector" of civic life. We encourage civic institutions to carefully consider when civic labor should be rewarded, financially or otherwise.

They can also help to bridge the participation gap for **people on fixed incomes, for whom a babysitter or missed shift at work would have detrimental financial consequences. Rewarding civic contributions is an essential tool in creating a more equitable process and ensuring that a range of diverse voices are included.**

Free Expression

DOES THE PROCESS ALLOW PEOPLE TO FREELY EXPRESS THEMSELVES?

One fundamental value of a free society is the ability for individuals to express themselves freely and to engage with government without fear of reprisals. Free expression also requires that participants — whether online or in-person — feel safe in their interactions.

To gauge expression, civic institutions could ask::

- **During {interaction}, I felt that I could express my perspective freely.**

In addition to a survey question, governing bodies could ask themselves, are there barriers to open expression? Are there specific instances of engagement where it may be hard or potentially dangerous for a person to speak up? Are there instances where people may feel coerced by the institution to communicate in a certain way? Understanding the barriers to free expression are as equally important as understanding the gateways to free expression.

Collective Empowerment Example: Public Official Town Hall

A state public official wants to understand if their town halls empower people to speak up and talk about important issues within their communities. In addition to evaluating internal practices like the town hall agenda and speaking processes, they give out an anonymous survey. The survey is three questions, plus one open-ended feedback question:

Please answer the following questions on a scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree (Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)

1. During this town hall, I felt that my public official tried to understand how I, or my community, was feeling.
2. I felt this engagement was an effective or productive use of my time.
3. During this town hall, I felt that I could express my perspective freely.
4. ——
5. Do you have any additional feedback that you would like to give? [Open-ended]

5

EFFICACY

Internal, external, and "government" efficacy

"Efficacy" is a term used in political science to convey people's personal beliefs in their abilities to take part in civic endeavors their sense of whether that participation is worthwhile. It is considered one of the driving forces behind civic participation. By measuring the impact of engagement with government services or participatory processes on individuals' sense of efficacy, institutions can better understand the impact of these interactions on individuals' sense of empowerment within governing systems. Greater efficacy creates a virtuous circle: the more a person feels empowered to seek help, engage, or participate, the more likely they are to re-engage, seek services, and share their input.

Most traditional measures of political efficacy use two distinct constructs: ***internal political efficacy*** and ***external political efficacy***. For interactions that include accessing government services or requesting input on government policies, we suggest that agencies consider an additional efficacy element: measuring individuals' sense of ***government efficacy***.

Internal Efficacy

HOW DOES THE PROCESS IMPACT INDIVIDUALS' SENSE OF INTERNAL POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT?

Internal efficacy measures a person's feelings of competence to understand and to participate effectively in civic matters; the metric concerns the individual and their power. Studies show that the more a person feels a high level of internal political efficacy, the more likely they are to discuss and participate in institutional civic endeavors (e.g., voting, attending rallies, contacting government officials, political deliberation).

Internal political efficacy is generally measured using four questions that are compared before and after an event. These questions are based on a person's feeling of self qualification, understanding of issues, information about politics and government, and ability to politically perform comparative to others. All questions provide a Likert scale of agreement.

- **I consider myself well-qualified to participate in [process].**
- **I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of [issue or process in question].**
- **I think that I am better informed about [issue or process in question] than most people.**
- **I feel that I could do as good a job on [issue or process in question] as most other people**

NOTE: *All four questions must be asked together for a validated measure of internal efficacy. Removing one question changes the effectiveness of the metric. Each question on its own does not measure internal efficacy. A composite score from all four questions is required for a measure of internal efficacy.*

External Efficacy

HOW DOES THE PROCESS IMPACT INDIVIDUALS' SENSE OF EXTERNAL POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT?

External efficacy measures individuals' perceptions of the responsiveness of government to their needs — their sense of how receptive the external world is to their actions.

Two questions are generally used to measure external efficacy. Both questions use a Likert scale of agreement that measure whether their voice is valued by public officials and government entities:

- **[Agency or government institution] does not care what people like me think.**
- **People like me DON'T have any say about what the [Agency or government institution] does.**

Government Efficacy

HOW DOES THE PROCESS IMPACT INDIVIDUALS' SENSE OF COLLECTIVE POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT?

Government efficacy measures individuals' perceptions of government responsiveness to the collective, not just the person answering the survey. Researchers have found that a high level of government efficacy is associated with an increased level of engagement with news media, increasing civic awareness and participation.

- **[Agency or government institution] works on everyone's behalf**
- **[Agency or government institution makes decisions based on what citizens want**
- **[Agency or government institution] represent [specific population]**
- **[Agency or government institution] works well**
- **[Agency or government institution] is the result of everyone's input**
- **[Agency or government institution]'s decisions are transparent**

6

TRUST

Trust in actions and information; trust through actions

Trust is essential to the effectiveness and legitimacy of governing bodies. It is the foundation of public social cohesion. An extreme lack of trust in governing systems decreases motivation for the public to comply with government policies and participate in the governing process. But that does not mean that "mistrust" is always a bad thing. In a democratic system, a degree of mistrust can motivate the public to pay attention and form the basis of support for accountability and oversight efforts. In a healthy democracy, individuals find effective methods for raising issues and calling for policy change *within* existing governing processes and opportunities to engage.

Currently, some U.S. federal government agencies use questions like, "this interaction increased my trust in [Program/Service name]" or "I trust [Agency/Program/Service name] to fulfill our country's commitment to [relevant population]." For example Veterans Affairs uses the question "I trust VA to fulfill our country's commitment to Veterans".

Although these broad measures of trust can be useful, we encourage a further narrowing of the scope of these questions to align with specific instances interactions and topics, i.e.: "trust in *what* and trust in *whom*?" We suggest exploring the concepts of **trust in government**, **trust in actions**, and **trust in information**.

Trust in Government

DO PARTICIPANTS TRUST GOVERNMENT GENERALLY?

Trust in government is a useful measure that should be deployed with caution. When trust in government is asked in surveys, it's often unclear where a person's perception of trust is rooted. Some studies in the U.S. show that general trust measures correlate with the president and Congress (mostly Congress) when deployed for evaluations.

Nonetheless, asking about trust in the context of focus groups or ethnographic studies can be incredibly important and revealing. Those discussions can offer deeper insights into perceptions of trust, especially when organizations like the government assume trust is present because they have a monopoly over public services.

Trust in Actions

DO PARTICIPANTS TRUST THE AGENCY OR ORGANIZATION TO PERFORM A SPECIFIC TASK OR SERVICE?

These questions narrow the evaluation of trust to particular actions. This narrowing can help organizations specify where exactly trust is falling short within specific practices.

Academic surveys ask about trust on a scale of time:

- **How much of the time do you think you can trust {institution} to {specific action}?** (Just about always, most of the time, only some of the time)

Other versions of the trust question, like the Net Promoter Score, could also be used:

- **I would recommend that a friend contact {institution} to do {process}")**

Trust in Information

DO PARTICIPANTS TRUST THE INFORMATION PRESENTED?

Trust in information is another component of our overall trust metric. This question also correlates to the metric of Civic Knowledge, because choices around the selection and display of information could affect people's trust of that information. The OECD provides trust markers of official statistics, which can be useful to determine people's trust in information.

- **Personally, how much trust do you have in {information} produced by {organization}? For example {...}?** (Trust them greatly, Tend to trust them, Tend not to trust them, Distrust them greatly, Not sure or don't know)

To Consider when Measuring Trust

Trust is a complex metric. Qualitative methods like focus groups, interviews, and open-ended survey questions can help highlight specific reasons behind people's overall trust scores.

Trust can be volatile, especially when the governing organization is under intense public scrutiny. We suggest that organizations rely on more than just metrics of trust to evaluate the civic experience

7

CLOSING THE LOOP

Follow through and thanks

Once a person has engaged with government or a civic process, they want to know that their actions were worth the time and effort. They need follow-through to establish a sense of accomplishment and impact.

This is a quality that is sorely missing in many aspects of governing institutions. Once a person takes the time to interact, there is often very little incentive for governing institutions to follow-up on how that interaction impacted their actions. Even if institutions have a method to follow up, it can be unclear to participants where that information is located. Thus, governing institutions need to evaluate how they are closing the loop on engagement.

After a person engages in a civic process, they want to know that such engagement had an impact in some way. Or, if there was no impact, people deserve an explanation as to why. Governing institutions need to show vulnerability when things don't work out.

Some questions for governing institutions to ask themselves are:

- **Did we take the time to reach out to people after participation to explain the outputs?**
- **Did we offer people insight into how participation was processed/input was evaluated?**
- **Did we provide information on next-steps and what will happen in the future?**

Surveys can also invite participants to state their perceptions of the governing institutions follow-thru. For example:

- **{Specify institution} showed me how my {specify interaction} affected {specify outcome}**
- **I feel that {specify institution} will use the input from me from {the interaction} in their {specify decision-making process}.**

Closing the Loop Example: Participatory Budgeting

A local city hosted a participatory budgeting event to help the city decide how to spend a surplus of funds for the year. The event allowed anyone in the city to submit budget proposals and vote on other resident's proposals. The top proposals would be funded.

Problem: After the budgeting event took place and the top proposals were announced, the city promised to implement those proposals in their upcoming projects. However, the city did not provide follow-thru to the event. There was no way for city residents to track the status of those proposals and see the outcomes of each budget investment. As a result, many residents did not feel like the participatory budgeting event led to any improvements to their city.

Solution: The participatory budgeting organizers heard about this issue and were determined to fix it. The following year, the organizers provided monthly updates on the status of each funded proposal. The final outcomes of each proposals were displayed during the following year's budgeting process. This transparency ensured that people were aware of the final outcomes of each budgeting process.

8 REOPENING THE LOOP

Providing opportunities for future action

The end of an interaction between a person and a governing institution is also an opportunity to jump-start a new civic interaction—what we are calling "reopening the loop." This relates to the section on Civic Knowledge in asserting that knowledge and empowerment gained from one experience should increase the potential that individuals feel empowered and sufficiently knowledgeable to engage in another experience.

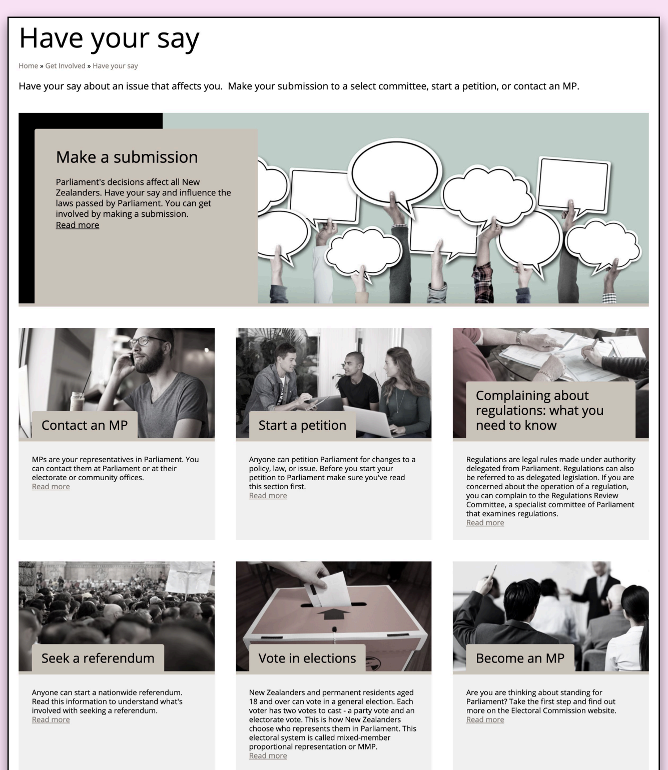
Governing institutions should ask:

- **Did I offer further opportunities for engagement?**

A great example of this is the New Zealand government's "Have Your Say" page, which lists all the ways people could communicate with their government. One could imagine this page is presented to people after each civic engagement activity within government. As a result, the end of one engagement can spur another.

It's not always appropriate to promote further engagement, especially within sensitive interactions. Thus, it is important to recognize the limits of re-engagement suggestions. At the same time, engagement can come in all different ways, not just at the inter-institutional level. What would it look like for one governing institution at the federal level to promote engagement in another governing institution at the state level? Engagement is multi-dimensional across agencies, branches, and jurisdictions.

Empowering through "Reopening the Loop"



The New Zealand Parliament's "Have your say" page provides citizens with a range of options for making change in government — from "complaining about regulations" to running for office.

- Make a submission
- Contact a Member of Parliament
- Start a petition
- Complain about regulations
- Seek a referendum
- Vote in elections
- Run for office

SCENARIO A [Local Example]

The local school board wants to discuss plans for renovating the local high-school. The plans are in their initial stages and require input from the local community.

1

PEOPLE

- List the possible stakeholders of the meeting (e.g., students, teachers, administrators, renovation contractors, parents, etc.)
- Evaluate how possible attendees are invited (e.g., school announcements, Social Media, Parent-teacher meetings, newspaper announcements?)
- Identify and how they engaged? (e.g., where there more parents than teachers? Did PTA members speak out more than students?

2

CIVIC KNOWLEDGE

- Identify required competencies (e.g., Do people need to know about the schools budgets to participate?)
- Evaluate how information about the renovation is presented (e.g., Are all attendees provided easy-to-read information about the renovation project?)
- Ensure expectation for the meeting are clear (e.g., is the board open to blue-sky suggestions for larger renovations or only small scale improvements? Are people expected to discuss renovation ideas in small groups or public presentations?)

3

WAYFINDING

- Ensure opportunities for discovery (e.g., Can potential stakeholders find out about this meeting online?)
- Evaluate the usability of the meeting (e.g., Is the venue accessible to all persons? Can people navigate the meeting easily?)
- Establish a sense of orientation (e.g., Do people know who makes the final decisions? What departments oversee the local school board?)

4

COLLECTIVE EMPOWERMENT

- Establish a sense of empathy (e.g., promote an active listening environment to everyone's renovation ideas)
- Establish a sense of inclusion (e.g., does everyone who attends have the opportunity to speak? What about those who are unable to attend?)
- Promote respect: (e.g., Is the meeting time appropriate? Are we taking the time to seriously consider everyone's input?)
- Free Expression: (e.g., Are attendees able to freely express their ideas? Are they being limited them in some way?)

5

EFFICACY

- Do people feel empowered by the renovation meeting? Do they feel that they are able to effectively offer suggestions to the school board (internal efficacy) and that the school board is receptive to those suggestions (external efficacy)? Is the school board responsive to all people's public input (government efficacy)?

6

TRUST

- Establish a sense of trust that stakeholder opinions are considered in the renovation decisions.
- Establish a sense of trust that the school board to do what is best for the school and community.

7

CLOSING THE LOOP

- Ensure that meeting attendees have follow-the for next steps in the renovation process. Ensure those next steps are transparent.
- Provide evidence of impact that the public comments from stakeholders will have on the renovation decisions.

8

REOPENING THE LOOP

- Invite meeting attendees to participate further in other school board meetings or other meetings/engagments related to the renovation project.

SCENARIO B [Federal Example]

The federal government's environmental agency is running a webinar on the regulations of oil extraction on public lands.

1

PEOPLE

- List the possible stakeholders of the meeting (e.g., public land advocates, communities affected by oil extraction on public land, environmental groups, environmental agency personnel, oil businesses, public interest groups)
- Evaluate how possible attendees are invited (e.g., online announcement, newsletter invitations, community outreach?)
- Identify and how they engaged? (e.g., were there opportunities to ask questions?)

2

CIVIC KNOWLEDGE

- Identify required competencies (e.g., Do people need to know about oil regulation or public land rules to participate?)
- Evaluate how information is presented (e.g., Does the webinar provide easy-to-understand information?)
- Ensure expectation for the meeting are clear (e.g., is the webinar solely educational? Is there room for questions or comments?)

3

WAYFINDING

- Ensure opportunities for discovery (e.g., Can potential stakeholders find out about this meeting online?)
- Evaluate the usability of the meeting (e.g., Is the webinar accessible to all persons? Can they access the webinar by phone? Is the webinar interface easy to navigate, especially for digital non-natives?)
- Establish a sense of orientation (e.g., Do people know what agency runs the webinar? Do people know who makes the final decisions on regulations? Do they know how oil regulate are written and how external stakeholders can impact those regulations?)

4

COLLECTIVE EMPOWERMENT

- Establish a sense of empathy (e.g., promote an understanding of everyone's perspectives and political debates)
- Establish a sense of inclusion (e.g., does everyone who attends have the opportunity to speak or are reflected in the webinar? What about those who are unable to attend?)
- Promote respect: (e.g., Is the meeting time and venue appropriate?)
- Free Expression: (e.g., Are there ways for people to speak after the webinar presentation is complete? Are there other transparent venues of input?)

5

EFFICACY

- The agency could measure if a person's feelings of internal, external, and political efficacy change as a result of attending the webinar.
- Did the information empower individuals to be informed and able to participate in these discussions? Does the webinar make people feel the agency in receptive to peoples input about oil regulation on public lands?

6

TRUST

These webinars should convey a sense of trust to stakeholders and the broader public that the agency is fully addressing regulation of oil on public lands. Depending on the desired type of trust, the agency could ask:

- Does the attendees trust the information provided by the webinar?
- Does attendees trust that the agency to upholds its duties in regulating oil?
- Do attendees trust in the government generally.

7

CLOSING THE LOOP

- Ensure that they are providing next steps for participation in this topic, and what the agency will do going forward.
- If there are any desired outputs to the webinar, ensure those outputs are disclosed to all attendees and stakeholders of interest.

8

REOPENING THE LOOP

- The agency should provide opportunities for stakeholders and other participants to engage in other events hosted by the agency, such as other webinars and public commenting periods.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Samantha loves to think about the ethical, political, and cultural implications of designing systems for civic engagement. She served as a the Civic Experience Lead at the POPVOX Foundation from March–June 2021, where she conducted research on public engagement methods and developed the "CivX" Metrics Toolkit.

Samantha received her Ph.D. in May 2021 from the University of California, Irvine, working in the Donald Bren School of Information and Computer Sciences on human-computer interaction, representative democracy, and civic tech.

As a part of her Ph.D. work, she conducted research on constituent engagement with Congress with the support of Congressional Management Foundation and Democracy Fund. Her dissertation research evaluated asynchronous deliberative engagement experiments on POPVOX.

ABOUT THE POPVOX FOUNDATION

POPVOX
FOUNDATION

The POPVOX Foundation was created in early 2021 with a mission to support innovation in government and civic engagement.

This includes reimagining the concept of "civic infrastructure," and providing new ways for government to share information and engage the public, with an emphasis on diverse participation and rebuilding public trust.

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