



Challenges in Community Engagement

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In the Tamarack **Learning Centre** we support our learners in the **five interconnected practices** that we believe lead to impactful **community change**.



In **Vibrant Communities**, we support **cities and local leaders** to implement large-scale change initiatives to **reduce poverty, deepen community, build youth futures and address climate transitions**.

CHALLENGES IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

1

How to engage well in
a hybrid world?

2

How to respond to an
increased sense of
polarization?

3

How to shift to
community-led
initiatives?

1

How to engage well in a hybrid world?

Hybrid Engagement

A few years ago

In-person
Data Walk

Sensemaking in
real-time

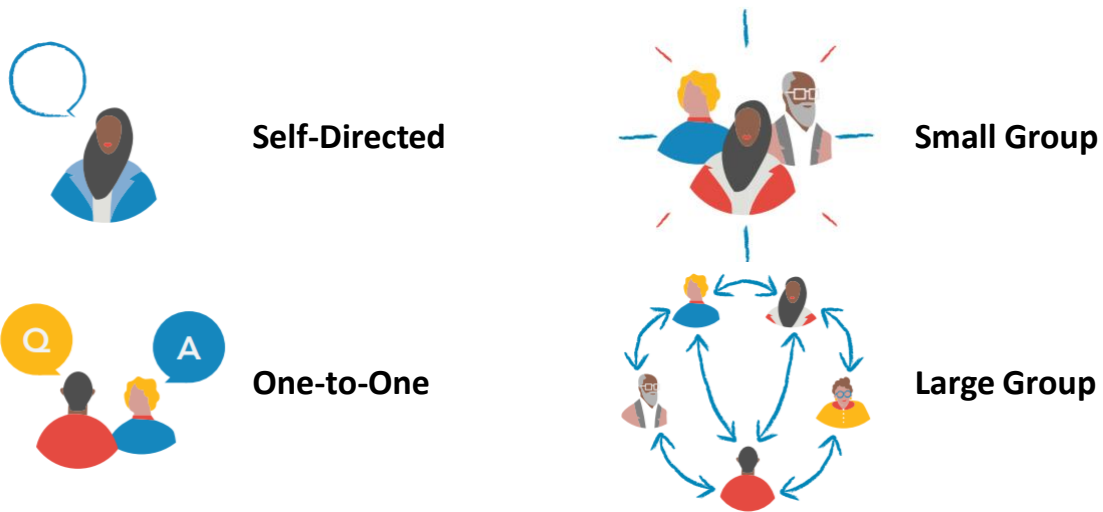


Now

- In-person data walk
- Hosted data walks
- Virtual Data Walk with key stakeholder groups
- Ability for individuals to walk through the data on their own and contribute asynchronously

- Synthesizing insights and inviting all to a virtual sensemaking session

Engagement Formats



[Inclusive Community Engagement: In a Time of Physical Distancing](https://capire.com.au/communities/publications/)
<https://capire.com.au/communities/publications/>

Hybrid Engagement

A/B

Integrated

Making one engagement method work for both in-person and virtual participants at the same time



Why & When?

- Allows for all participants to be part of the same experience (kind of)
- Use when synchronous is important (e.g. significant announcement, crisis response, problem solving, relationship-building)

A+B

Multimodal

Using engagement methods that can be adapted to both in-person and virtual settings



Why & When?

- Allows a full spectrum of participation - Celebrate that you are increasing accessibility
- Allows for greater reach
- Offers an equitable engagement experience

A/B | Integrated

Making one engagement method work for both in-person and virtual participants at the same time

For later reference

Why & When?

- Allows for all participants to be part of the same experience (kind of)
- Use when synchronous is important (e.g. significant announcement, crisis response, problem solving, relationship-building)

Successful methods:

- World Café
- Livestreaming with commenting
- Virtual presentation + localized discussion & shared discussion
- Document co-creation
- Virtual whiteboarding



A/B | Integrated

For later reference

Making one engagement method work for both in-person and virtual participants at the same time

Tips:

Space set up

- Requires great tech support and facilitation
- Sound, video quality & positioning is important
- Offer host spaces for people who don't have good digital access to join from

Structure

- Get participant feedback on preference for small group discussion
- Set up dedicated time for virtual participants to interact with speakers
- The pattern of individual contribution → sensemaking works well across modes

Actively bridge spaces

- Have a shared workspace to capture contributions from all participants (Mural, Google Doc, graphic recorder)
- Set up communication channels between participants and between in-person & virtual
- Always assign people to be the 'holders' of the virtual people
- Set up connection stations for mingling time



For later reference

A+B | Multimodal

Using engagement methods that can be adapted to both in-person and virtual settings

Why & When?

- Allows a full spectrum of participation - Celebrate that you are increasing accessibility
- Allows for greater reach
- Offers an equitable engagement experience

Successful methods:

- Data Walk
- Focus group
- Mapping
- Crowdsourcing ideas / ideation
- Participatory budgeting
- Open space
- Digital storytelling session

Tips:

- Plan on hosting the engagement multiple times
- Allow time for synthesis and sensemaking across modes (comprehensive sensemaking cannot be done in the moment)
- When possible – share back a rolling summary of who has participated so far to offer a sense of the whole



HYBRID WORLD

What can we do about it?

- Plan for accessibility (e.g. internet connectivity differences)
- We need to engage in ways that respond to these needs
- A single big event is no longer the gold standard
- Design for iterative engagement
- Offer different formats to suit different people
- Ensure connection opportunities are built in
- Share the role of doing the engaging – invite people to host their own engagements

2

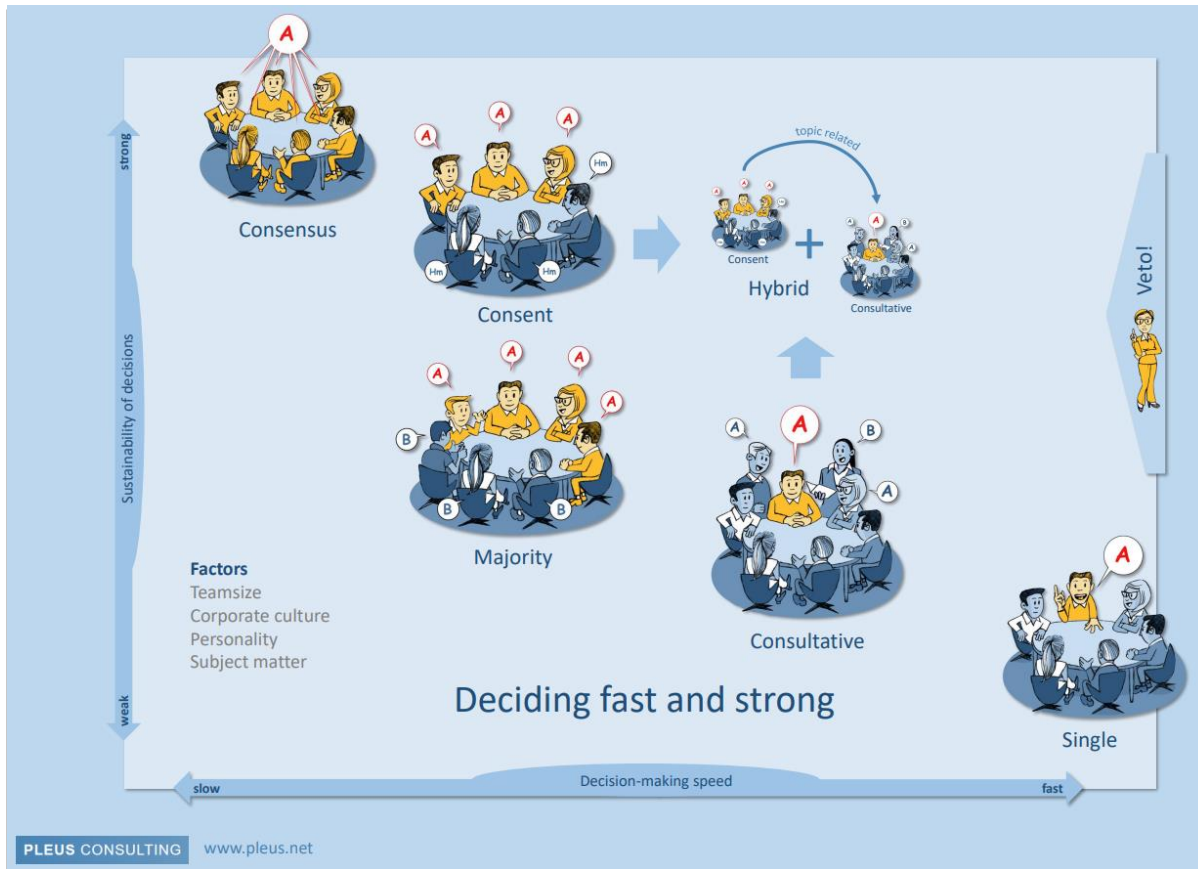
How to respond to
increased sense of
polarization?

OPINION
1

OPINION
2

OPINION
3

OPINION
4



Types of decisions

- **Consensus:** Everyone fully supports the decision.
- **Consent:** Everyone supports the decision as "good enough."
- **Compromise:** Each person gives up something to reach a decision.
- **Counting** (majority vote): The "side" with the most votes wins the decision.
- **Consult:** The leader wants the group's input but makes the final decision.

SENSE OF POLARIZATION

What can we do about it?

- Create spaces for deep collaborative engagement where equity is foundational to all practices.
 - Seek diversity of perspectives
 - Ensure representation
 - Reduce barriers to inclusion
- Explore methods for working together between people with diverse perspectives.
- Understand group decision-making processes and the importance of deliberation.

GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT

The Gradients of Agreement is an 8-point scale for expressing support.

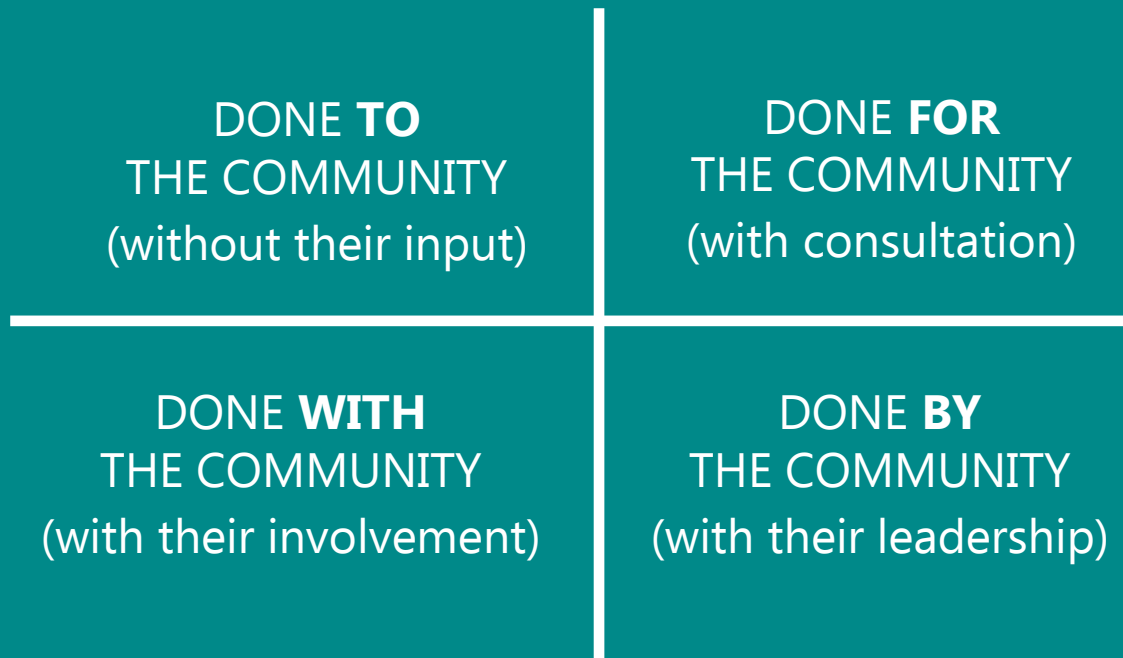
1. Whole-hearted Endorsement: “I really like it!”
2. Agreement with a Minor Point of Contention: “Not perfect, but it’s good enough.”
3. Support with Reservations: “I can live with it.”
4. Abstain: “This issue does not affect me.”
5. More Discussion Needed: “I don’t understand the issues well enough yet.”
6. Don’t Like But Will Support: “It’s not great, but I don’t want to hold up the group.”
7. Serious Disagreement: “I am not on board with this - don’t count on me. “
8. Veto: “I block this proposal.”

Each person tells the decision maker(s) where they sit regarding a proposed option along this scale, and explains that rating. For example: “I’m a 3 on this option. I can live with it, but I’m not wild about including cake with every meal. I’d prefer pie.”

3

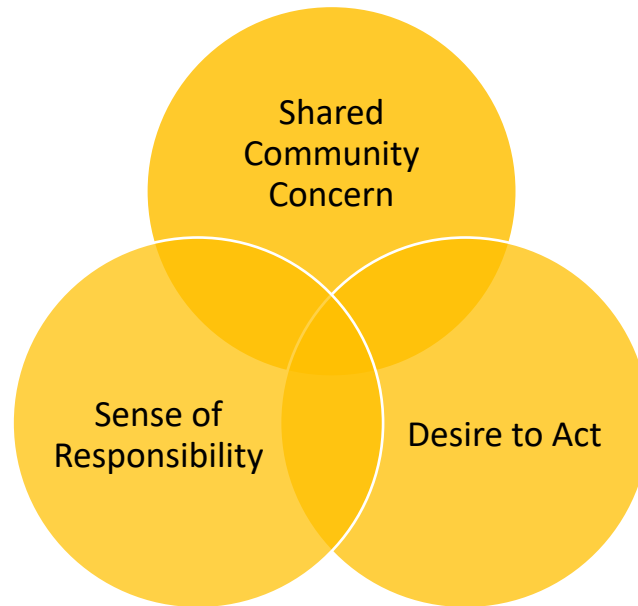
How to shift toward
community-led initiatives?

What's your relationship with the community for this work?



Adapted from Cormac Russell | www.nurtureddevelopment.org

Conditions for Community-Led Approaches



Concepts of Community Ownership from (Wessells, 2018, p. 11)

SHIFT TOWARD COMMUNITY-LED

What can we do about it?

- To understand key issues and barriers, engage people with lived and living experience of the issue in meaningful ways. Amplify key messages to build shared awareness.
- Explore the role of the community from being the recipient of programs and services to having ownership and investment in the things that matter most to them.
- Think about ways to ‘give power’ and invite those who are most impacted to lead
- Get tangible and specific with the actions that are possible



UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY-LED APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY CHANGE

LISA ATTYGALLE

There has been a marked increase in demand for ‘Community-Led’ approaches to change across the country. Black Lives Matter, Idle No More, poverty reduction, and youth empowerment provide just a few examples. This shows incredible promise for advances towards community ownership of decision-making practices and active citizen participation in community life. We need to be intentional though about what ‘Community-Led’ means so that communities are not inadvertently acted-upon, and instead are empowered through leadership.

THE DISCREPANCY IN ‘COMMUNITY-LED’ VERBIAGE

Our team undertook a review of 67 organizations who use the term ‘Community-Led’ to describe their approaches to community change and found a substantial range in engagement practices, from completely grassroots citizen action through to organizations consulting with community stakeholders on program development.

The discrepancy may come from the gap that lies between the intent of community change organizations, practitioners, and advocates—to empower community members to make decisions that impact their futures—and engrained ways of working—where power is held by organizations or funders in ‘service’ of the community.

It may also come from those who overpromise or are disingenuous—saying ‘Community-Led’ when in fact they don’t intend to give that much power to the community, or arrogantly assume they can speak FOR community or KNOW what community wants. All too often, the term ‘Community-Led’ overlooks the diversity of perspectives that typically exists within communities in favour of promoting a homogenous and/or over-simplified stereotype.

The risk of such a large discrepancy between intent, wording, and actions is significant: communities may continue to be acted-upon; organizations may continue to lack proximity to the issues which could lead to them making assumptions that may exacerbate existing systemic biases; trust between community members and organizations may be eroded; and, organizations may be limiting the

<https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/library/paper-understanding-community-led-approaches-community-change-lisa-attygalle>

Resources

[Tamarack Resource Library](#)

[Article - Understanding Community-Led Approaches](#)

[Tool – Index of Community Engagement Techniques](#)

[Foundations of Community Engagement Course](#)

[Post related to consultation fatigue](#)