Designing and Conducting Successful Community Engagements

Shawn Spano, PhD

San Jose State University &
the Public Dialogue Consortium

Purposes of this Session

- Enhance understanding of community engagement
- Learn how to:
  - Design CE events and meeting formats
  - Frame specific discussion questions
  - Deal with difficult behavior

Quick Reflection on your CE Experiences . . .

- What community engagement events have you been involved in?

- What happened?
  - Successes . . .
  - Challenges . . .

Community Engagement is <u>not</u> …

- Selling the public on…

- Getting votes for…

- Convincing the public to…

- Council/Board meetings, formal public hearings, etc.

Community Engagement is . . .

- About forming relationships with the public
- A process for eliciting different views and perspectives on issues and policies
- A way to involve the public in framing issues, discussing trade-offs, making decisions

Community Engagement: Working the Gaps

Community

Administrative

Political
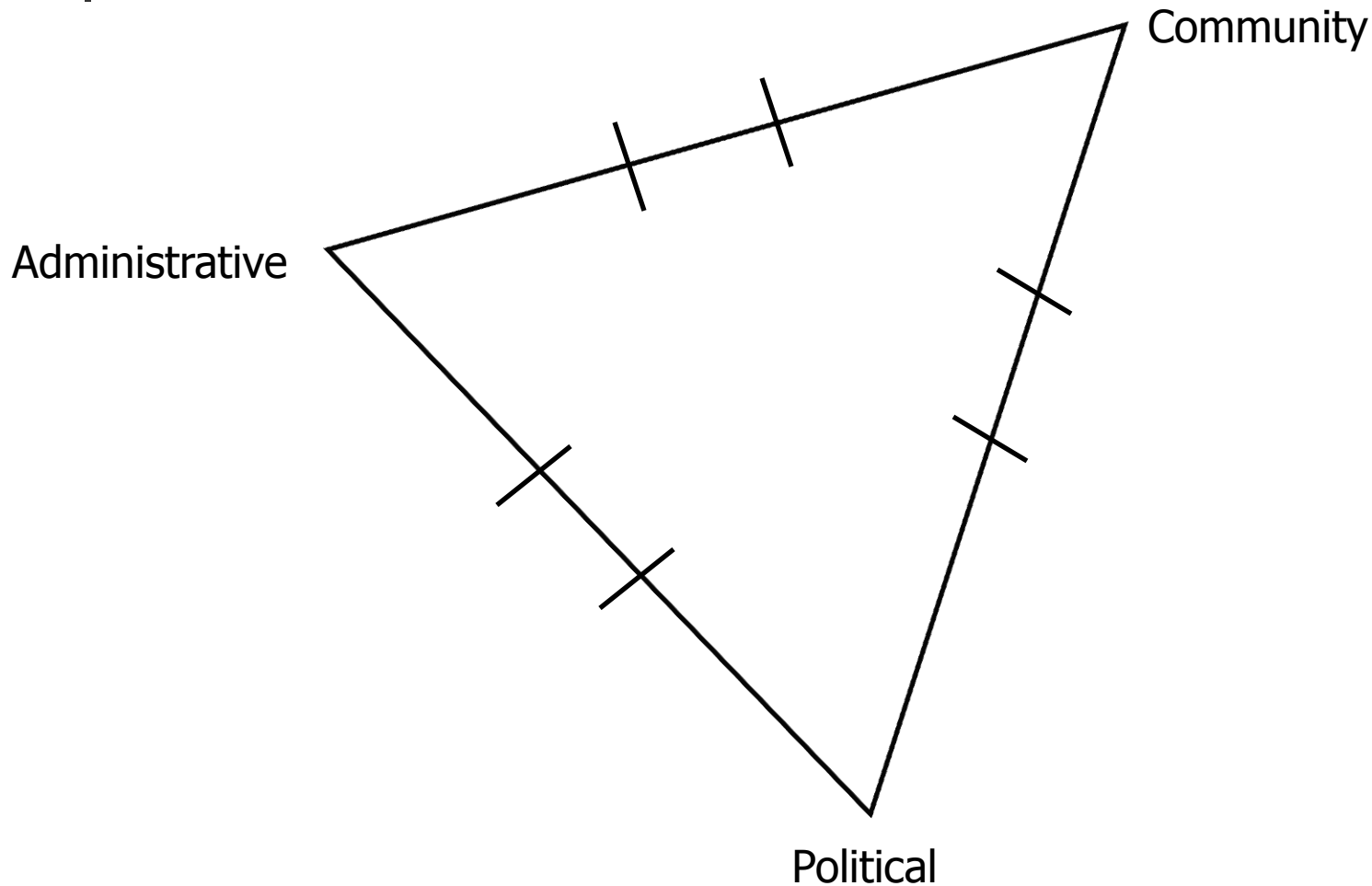
Design Tool: IAP2 Spectrum

Increasing Levels of Public Participation →

	Inform	**Consult**	**Involve**	**Collaborate**	**Empower**
What is your Goal?	Provide information to the public	Elicit feedback from the public	Work with the public to ensure their views are considered	Partner with the public to ensure their views are incorporated	The public develops the choices and makes the decisions
What is your Promise to the Public?	We will keep you informed	We will listen to your views	We will *try* to include your views	We *will* include your views	We will implement what you decide

Design Checklist:
What Should Planners Consider

- What are the audiences' perspectives, needs and expectations?

- What is the participation goal of the meeting?

- Does the audience have the same goal? How do you know?

- How should the issue or topic of the meeting be framed and presented?

- How should the meeting be designed?

Developing Meeting Formats → agendas

- Start with the goal and outcome; work backwards
    - What needs to happen 1st, 2nd, etc. to get to the outcome?
    - How will the audience be engaged in light of the participation goal?
- Be creative with formats (small groups, technology, multi-media, post-its, etc.)

Set the Meeting Context

- Welcome and introductions
- Preview agenda; identify goals, outcomes and ground rules
- Bring people up to date; what led to the meeting
- Define roles and meeting format
- Provide information and data that is relevant, concise, valid and accessible

Framing Discussion Questions

- Start with open-ended questions
  - Limited number; accessible wording
  - Include on the agenda
- Follow up with closed-ended questions to clarify and narrow
- Pay attention to wording and tone
  - Avoid leading & argumentative questions
  - Ask *forward leaning* questions

Close Meetings with Clear Direction

- End at the designated time, or check with participants to go beyond
- Summarize key points and decisions; confirm with the participants
- Agree on critical tasks, completion dates and follow-up steps
- Use the results going forward to shape the next steps

Dealing with Difficult Behavior

- Anger and Negative Emotion
  - Don't take it personally!
  - Acknowledge the anger and emotion
  - Move forward by focusing on the issue, not the person
- Interruptions
  - Respectfully intervene
  - Make use of ground rules

Dealing with Difficult Behavior

- Complaining and Criticizing
  - Acknowledge the concerns expressed
  - Reframe the positive vision behind the person's complaint
  - Ask for a solution or way forward
- The "Over" Contributor
  - Thank the person for participating
  - Create space for others to speak

Your Turn . . .

Questions and Discussion