YOUTH-LED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROJECT MODULE

A Collaboration Between GPCOG, City of Portland, and Cultivating Community with Technical Assistance support from Groundwork USA

January 26, 2017
Key Goals

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• **Engage** diverse local Portland teens in collecting feedback from East Bayside residents frequently missing in planning process.

• **Train** the teens with “light touch” strategies that collect a representative cross-section of neighborhood voices and inform this planning process.

• **Present** this community feedback to GPCOG, City and the Brownfield AWP Advisory Committee.

• **Ensure** East Bayside’s voices are documented in the final Area Wide Plan, and will inform future strategies and action steps.
Desired Youth Outcomes

Youth Outcomes

• Learn about Brownfields; environmental justice; how to get feedback from community members

• Identify community events/venues; conduct approximately 100 feedback interviews in East Bayside

• Sort and analyze the information received in those conversations

• Learn skills in and practice presenting and public speaking

• Photo document their work

• Conduct presentation to GPCOG, City, AWP Advisory Committee, and local stakeholders and families
Why Cultivating Community?

Cultivating Community’s mission: To create and sustain greater access to healthy, local foods; empower people to play many roles in restoring the local, sustainable food system; and model, teach, and advocate for ecological food production.

- Deep existing relationships, especially youth/immigrants and families living in Kennedy Park
- Local stakeholder (Boyd Street Farm) reclaiming contaminated land for community benefit
- Strong cultural competency helpful for ensuring a representative cross-section of neighborhood voices are part of this planning process
Students learned about brownfields.

- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines brownfields as: "real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant."

- In other words, any piece of land whose soil or groundwater contains (or MIGHT contain) contamination can be considered a brownfield.

- Much of the land in East Bayside can be considered a brownfield site (historically this area was low-lying tidal flats that were filled in with debris/soil from the city’s Great Fire of 1866).
Getting Started: Foundational Learning

Students learned about getting feedback and why getting feedback from a representative sample of local residents is important in informing development and changes in a neighborhood.

- EPA granted Portland funds to study East Bayside’s brownfields, and to plan ways for reclaiming this land for community benefit.

- EPA recognizes that **Environmental Justice** (EJ) populations are burdened disproportionately by brownfield sites.
  
  - What do we mean by EJ populations?
    - People of color
    - Youth, elderly
    - Low/moderate-income neighborhoods
    - Areas of concentrated poverty

- So, EPA requires their grantees to reach all kinds of people/voices across the neighborhood to ensure that the expected wave of prosperity can be accessible to all, not just developers or property owners.
Collecting Feedback: Our Methodology

Students designed their engagement strategy and prepared to implement.

- We went out into the community and asked a series of questions.
  - The Advisory Committee supplied us with questions to ask.
- We recorded people’s answers on Amazon Fires.
- How did we practice?
- What questions did we ask?
- How did we get people to engage with us?
- Who generated the questions? (Advisory Committee at their September 2016 meeting)
Collecting Feedback: Our Methodology

Students selected a number of locations at which to collect feedback.

- Root Cellar
- East End Community School
- Walked along Cumberland Avenue & Washington Avenue
- Coffee By Design (Diamond St)

Why?
- We identified places where Environmental Justice populations were more likely to be present.
- We chose locations where we could encounter people, to connect with people in their daily routine, rather than expecting them to come to us.
Results: What Did People Say?

Students gathered feedback from around 100 people.

- We estimate that 50% of these encounters were with residents of East Bayside.
- We asked 12 questions in total.
- Each respondent was asked 3 randomly selected questions.
- No one respondent was asked the same 3 questions.
- We asked questions this way to remain in keeping with federal law (cannot ask >9 people the same question without federal review/approval).
What’s the upshot?

- People living in East Bayside love their community:
  - Its diversity
  - Its proximity to the ocean and downtown

- Gentrification (rising rents) and displacement are top of mind.

- People want:
  - Affordable housing
  - Recreational and non-motorized transit amenities
  - Jobs and job opportunities

- People want to be involved in things happening in East Bayside.
Project "Side Effects"

Students learned they:

• Are really good at explaining seemingly complicated things to people
• Are outgoing-- walking up to talk to people
• Enjoyed sharing their opinion and perspective with their team and the public
• Could work harder then they previously thought
• Found it easy to talk to people, even older folks and people they don’t know
• Are good at taking notes and thinking on their feet
Conclusion: Lessons Learned

What worked well?

• Excellent opportunity to connect youth and local stakeholders
• “Teachable moment” opportunity for youth was profound:
  • Built confidence, new skills
  • Created community engagement capacity in City that didn’t exist before
  • New fee-for-service opportunity for Cultivating Community

What would’ve worked better? How?

• Taking advantage of CC’s early fall recruitment cycle would’ve allowed for implementation before winter.
• Winter weather prevented door-to-door encounters, and lessened the number of people walking around.
• Securing permissions to do tabling at identified locations took longer than anticipated.
Questions, Next Steps, Things to be Explored...

• How can we ensure that East Bayside residents of ALL identities are reached?
  • This team could replicate this process in the springtime
  • Could go door-to-door
  • Easy to replicate now that pilot is complete

• In response to what people said, what should program planning and implementation look like? Who will lead it?

• Can we create **shared leadership roles** that include residents AND people paid to do this kind of work?