Making Citizen Engagement Meaningful

FCCMA
May 23, 2013
Presenters:

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Operational & Strategic Planning Manager
Alachua County - Office of Management and Budget

Suzanne Gable
Director of Strategic & Financial Planning
Sarasota County – Office of Financial Planning
Audience Response Technology

Use of audience response data cards (clickers)

• Allows for real time polling of participants
• Encourages all to participate...honestly
• Engages audience throughout the meeting
• Directs line of conversation to relevant data
• Allows for easy compilation of data for reporting
Is your agency a:

A. City
B. County
C. Special Taxing District
D. Other
What is your favorite college football team?

A. Florida State
B. Univ. of Florida
C. Univ. of Miami
D. Central Florida
E. South Florida

0% 0% 0% 0% 0%
Alachua County, FL:
• 250,000 population
• Gainesville is the County Seat
• Urban & Rural Communities
• Approx $125M general fund budget
Where is your jurisdiction located?

1. Northwest
2. Northeast
3. Central
4. Central-west
5. Southwest
6. Southeast
Our Community Conversation
A Little History:

• Economic downturn since 2007
• Highly educated citizenry
  • University of Florida
  • SHANDS Hospital
  • North Florida Regional Medical
• Board of County Commissioner’s directive
• County Manager’s vision
Stats:

- Community Conversations began in 2009
- 2012 was our 4th consecutive year
- During the past 4 years:
  - We’ve conducted 15 meetings
  - Engaged over 500 participants
- Share the results on the County’s website
Has your agency actively engaged ‘general citizens’ in the past year? (select all that apply)

A. Yes, survey
B. Yes, town hall
C. Yes, informal meetings
D. No
E. Don’t know
Why Engage your Citizenry:

• Engage citizens beyond Board meeting podium
• Educate citizens about budgeting process
• Non-confrontational community dialog
• Encourage non-participants to participate
• Spark interest in municipal activities
• Increase public involvement in...anything
Designing a Platform for Engagement:

- Consider your community values
- Craft a personal invitation
- Plan well, but keep it simple
- Incorporate meaningful dialog among citizens
- Educate by experience to increase understanding
What are your community values?
(Select in order of importance)

A. Public Safety
B. Environment
C. Economic Dev.
D. Transportation
E. Quality of Life (parks, libraries)
Research What Works:

Communities conducting citizen engagement activities

• Sarasota County, FL
• City of Clearwater, FL
• Polk County, FL
• Jefferson County, CO
Conversational Development:

- Peter Block – *Community: The Structure of Belonging*
- Transition from being the presenter to becoming the listener
- Ask meaningful open-ended questions in small groups to develop connections
- Successful engagement builds trust
Which best describes the audience participation in your jurisdiction

A. More staff than participants
B. Silence
C. A few speaking for all
D. Good and well balanced participation
Meeting Outline:

• Welcome

• County Manager Introduction
  • Small group discussions to encourage participant sharing – open ended questions
  • Demographics

• Fiscal Situation & Budget Overview
Meeting Outline:

• Service Level Expectations
• Simulation “Table-Top” Activity
• Group Reporting
• Idea Boards
Facilitated Discussions:

• Led by the County Manager
• Encouraged participation by all in attendance
• Citizen responses summarized and reported to the Commission

• Each session contained 2-3 questions for audience discussion
Facilitated Discussions:
Open Ended Discussions:

• What do you love most about living in Alachua County?

• With the current financial climate and changes, what do you fear most?

• What would excite and engage you enough to participate (or participate more frequently) in Alachua County Government?
Variety, Variety, Variety:

• Question formats (open, closed, correct answer, ranking, multiple selections)

• Change up the dialog format (small groups, individual, written, team)

• Challenge participants to sit with people they don’t know – share different ideas & opinions
Variety, Variety, Variety:

What specific idea(s) do you have for spending reductions that the Commission could address?
Video Presentation
Participant Outcomes:

• High level of experience sharing
• Identification of citizen needs and desires
• Citizens appreciate the transparency
• Better understanding of the difficulty in municipal budgeting
• Desire to maintain community identity
Agency Outcomes:

• Greater citizen trust, understanding, & support

• Identification of actual, not perceived, citizen needs and desires...used by
  • leadership, managers/supervisors, Commissioners

• Community liaisons

• Comprehensive results for future reference
Agency Outcomes:

Community Conversations

2012 Session Results

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<tr>
<th>Event Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number in Attendance</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>August 26, 2012 (Tuesday)</td>
<td>6:45 pm to 8:30 pm</td>
<td>Monticello Community Center (Monticello)</td>
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<td>August 30, 2012 (Monday)</td>
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The Community Conversations meeting sessions:
- Welcome from Commissioners
- Opening remarks from County Manager
- Small Group Conversations
- Audience triangulation questions
- Financial information and budget briefing
- Citizen participation service level questions
- Table top activity—Budget Exercise
- Parks and Recreation facilities

Small Group Conversations—Participants were asked to form small groups of no more than five to discuss questions such as:

- What makes you most proud of our community?
- What would excite and engage you enough to participate more frequently in Alachua County government?

For the first question, there were varied responses that included diversity, technology, natural environment, recreation, youth, and being a progressive community. The second question resulted in varied responses, including more focused meetings, addressing "big issues," having that our input is heard something, convenient location, quality, and timing, and ensuring that back rounders are more than participation will increase.
What is your favorite college football team?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Northwest</th>
<th>Northeast</th>
<th>Central</th>
<th>Central-west</th>
<th>Southwest</th>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Florida</td>
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<td>0%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Florida</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Has your agency actively engaged ‘general citizens’ in the past year?   (select all that apply)

- Yes, survey: 100% (City)
- Yes, town hall: 100% (City)
- Yes, informal meetings: 25% (City)
- No: 25% (City)
- Don’t know: 25% (City)

Legend:
- City
- County
- Special Taxing District
- Other
Tell us about your Citizen Engagement Activities....
Questions?
Making Citizen Engagement Meaningful

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