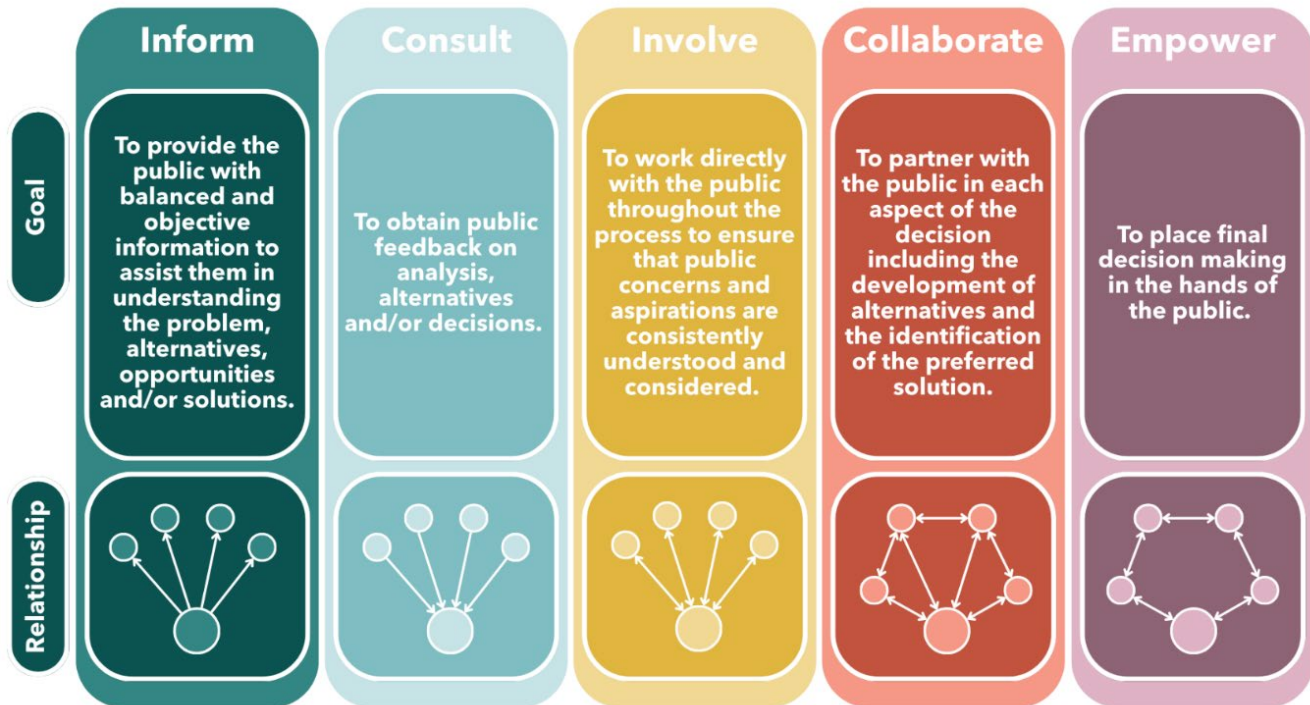


## TOOL IAP2 SPECTRUM OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

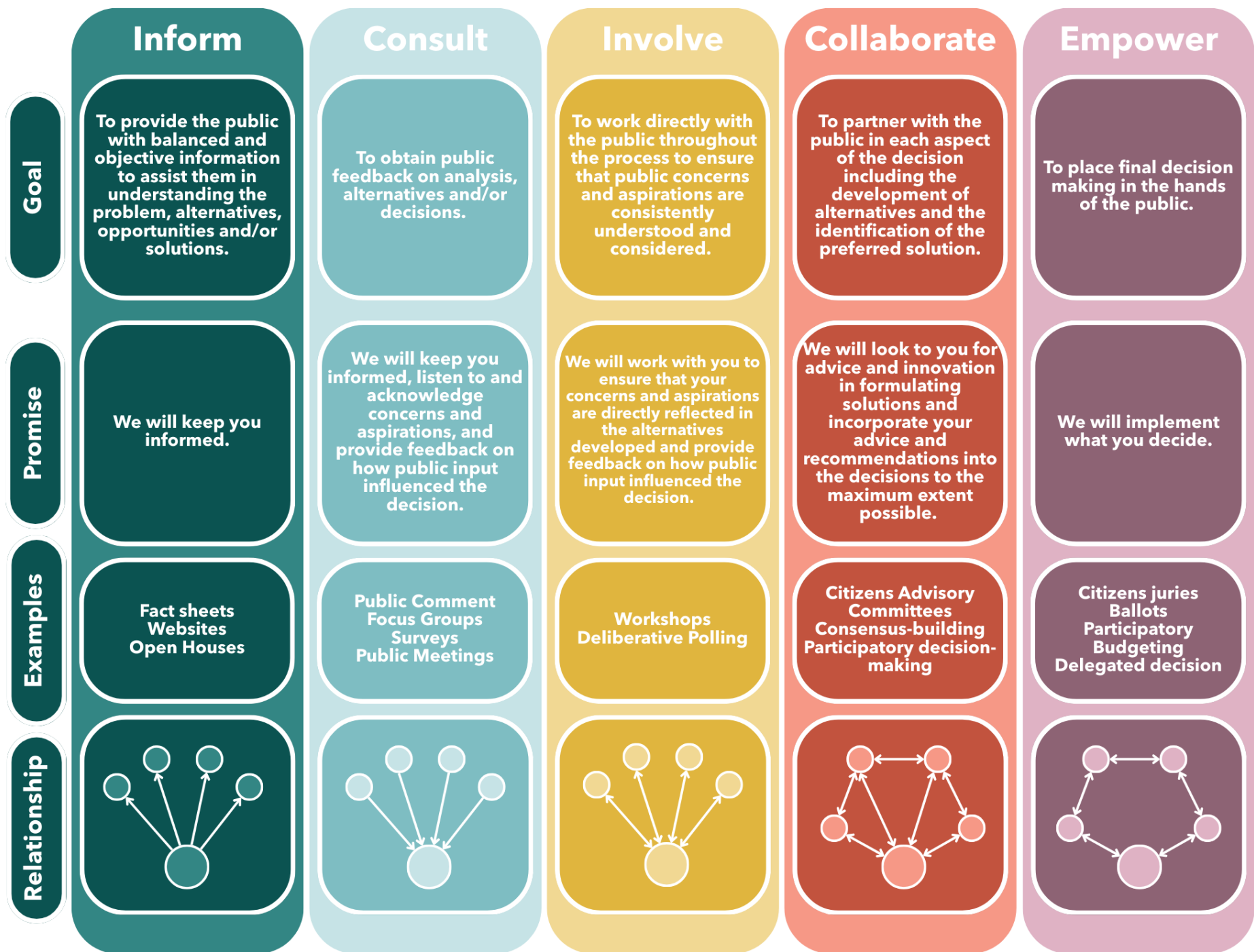


### OVERVIEW

The Spectrum of Public Participation, developed by the [International Association for Public Participation \(IAP2\)](#), can be used to determine the appropriate level of public engagement in a community project or process based on project goals. This tool helps you gain clarity about the overall level of participation that people will have at the onset of a project. It can also be utilized at various decision points within a project to specify the level of participation and influence that participants will have.

### WHEN TO USE

Use this tool when forming a new participatory body or group to determine the level of participation of group members. That way, you can let potential participants know their roles and their level of decision-making power. The tool can also be used to set expectations each time a group engages in a new initiative or decision.





Once you begin to engage community members, you can also use the tool to ask them how they would like to be engaged. In some cases, an organization may be willing to collaborate directly with the community, but community members may decide they don't have the time, interest, or resources to participate in a more intensive process and will opt for a different level of engagement.

## HOW TO USE

The first step in utilizing the tool is to ask how much influence and decision-making power participants will have in the process at hand. Often, organizations promise much more than they can deliver in terms of levels of decision making, leaving participants frustrated and disheartened by the amount of time and energy they've invested in a project, only to find that they are not the ultimate decision makers. This experience can lead to distrust in participatory processes and discourage participants from engaging in future efforts.

When organizations are clear up front about the level of participation and decision-making that participants will have in a process, participants are better able to choose whether the level of participation meets their own needs and goals.

Let's look at how this works in action using the following scenario:

In Community A, Latinx flu vaccination rates are consistently lower than those of white, non-Latinx community members. There are many reasons for the difference in vaccination rates rooted in structural inequities, including lack of health insurance, nearby providers, culturally and linguistically humble health care options, or options compatible with work schedules. Community A's Health Department would like to increase the number of vaccines provided to Latinx community members. Staff members utilize the IA2 Public Participation Spectrum to choose the appropriate level of public participation to help meet their goal. Each level of participation has strengths and challenges to consider, along with repercussions for the overall success of the project.

## INFORM

The goal of this level of participation is to provide the public with objective information to increase their understanding of a problem and possible solutions. Information is one-directional, coming from an organization or institution to the public.

**Strengths:** Agencies can use this method to share information with the public about an already decided-upon project or process. This method can be used when timelines and budgets are tight and don't allow for a larger participatory process.



**Challenges:** This level is the lowest form of participation and may impact the success of a process or project, given that people who have not had an opportunity to participate are less likely to care about the success of the project. Similarly, projects are less likely to succeed when they don't gather critical insight into the messages that resonate most with community members and their preferred methods for receiving those messages.

**Example:**

Community A's Public Health Department Director determines that the best way to boost Latinx flu vaccination rates is to engage in a communications campaign in Spanish about the importance of the flu vaccine. The Public Health Department produces fliers and hangs them in local schools, churches, and businesses. Community members do not have the opportunity to weigh in on the problem and the best way to design a successful solution. They are similarly unable to inform the messaging and the method with which it is delivered.

## CONSULT

The goal of this level of participation is to obtain guidance from the public. Participants can share their opinions and insight but are not the ultimate decision makers.

**Strengths:** Consulting can be done quickly and cheaply. It can give participants a feeling of meaningful contribution, especially when their feedback shapes the overall process and project, and that information is communicated back to them.

**Challenges:** While participants share their feedback, they are not the ultimate decision makers in the process. There is no guarantee that their guidance will be followed. Consulting doesn't allow community members to hear from differing perspectives in the community. This can be tricky when an organization hears multiple, conflicting opinions from the community and has to make a final decision that honors some perspectives more than others.

**Example:**

Community A's Public Health Department Director sends a survey to Latinx households in the area to learn more about the reasons that many Latinx community members are not vaccinated for the flu. Upon analyzing the results, she learns that many Latinx community members are unable to miss work to go to the health clinic during working hours. She decides that the Health Department will offer a free vaccine

clinic outside of typical working hours to raise Latinx vaccination rates and pulls together a one-time focus group of Latinx community members to hear their recommendations for the best time and place for the pop-up vaccination clinic to offer free vaccines. Some focus group members recommend weekends, while others say weeknights will be best. With limited capacity, the Public Department starts offering the clinics on Sundays.

## INVOLVE

The goal of the Involve level of participation is to work directly with the public to ensure that their aspirations and concerns are fully understood and taken into consideration along the way.

**Strengths:** This step creates more and deeper opportunities for engagement over time.

**Challenges:** Though more actively involved, participants do not have final decision-making authority.

### Example:

Community A's Health Department Director invites Latinx community members to a series of flu vaccine workshops and working sessions to learn more about the issue and ask for their thoughts and opinions on how to increase vaccine rates in the Latinx community. She learns that the Health Department's earlier Flu Vaccine Communications Campaign had little impact on Latinx community members because the campaign did not address the root cause. Latinx community members want to receive the flu vaccine but are unable to because they do not have health insurance and are unable to make it to a clinic within working hours. She asks participants for ideas on how to reach the vaccination campaign's goal of vaccinating more than 90% of Latinx community members and learns that community members believe that a multi-pronged approach that involves messaging by trusted community institutions like schools, churches, and local non-profit organizations paired with free pop-up vaccination clinics on the weekends and after hours would be the best way to reach the community. Participants suggest multiple dates, times, and locations that they think will work best, and the Health Department Director creates an events schedule and designates resources that take these community members' perspectives into account.



## COLLABORATE

The goal of the Collaborate level of participation is to partner with the community in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the preferred solution.

**Strengths:** Participants are actively involved in understanding the problem and identifying solutions and alternatives and have greater decision-making power than in previous levels.

**Challenges:** This level of participation takes time and resources. This approach also tends to be slower, which can be difficult for community members, impacted by an issue who need quick solutions. Consider this especially when multiple community engagement efforts are happening at once or community members have been engaged on an issue before.

### Example:

The Health Department Director decides to form a Latinx Community Advisory Board to address health disparities among Latinx community members. Of the many issues that the Advisory Board reviews, they determine that they would like focus on increasing flu vaccination rates within their community. They learn, through studying the issue, that vaccination rates are low, especially among the working population. They set a collective goal to vaccinate 90% of community members. They review the project budget and suggest a series of pop-up free clinics at several Latinx community events. Advisory Board members create an events calendar that they believe will enable them to reach the greatest number of unvaccinated people. Advisory Board members serve as ambassadors at these events and help spread the word in the community about the importance of the vaccine and the dates and times that free vaccines will be available for the community. These members review data after each event to determine how many community members were vaccinated and adjust plans as necessary to meet their collective goals.

## EMPOWER

The goal of the Empower level of participation places final decision-making in the hands of the public.

**Strengths:** This method offers the greatest level of participation and buy-in from the public when done correctly.

**Challenges:** This method is the most time and resource-intensive for both the organization



engaging the community and the community members. The more complicated or technical an issue, the more community members will need to be provided with knowledge to make an informed decision.

### Example:

A local Health Department sets aside a portion of its budget to address health disparities within the community. It leads a [Participatory Budgeting](#) process to allow community members to decide upon the problems that exist in the community and concrete solutions that could address those problems. A group forms to design a process that will allow the community to make the decision. They request proposals and host an idea fair at the local school. Everyone with an idea creates a trifold to quickly explain what they think should be done and how much it would cost. The entire community then votes to prioritize and finance a certain number of projects. Community members have the final say on the projects that will be financed.

For more information on ways to ethically engage the community, please see the following Canopy Resources:

- [Community Engagement Continuum Online Workshop](#)
- [Inclusive Community Event Checklist](#)

## COMMUNITY LEARNING MODEL

### *Include*

Ensure the various people, perspectives and systems involved in the work are engaged in the process.

IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation is a tool for the Include phase of the Community Learning Model. To learn more about tools for dialogue and the other areas of the Community Learning Model, visit [civiccanopy.org/clm](http://civiccanopy.org/clm).

