CivicWell Webinar:
Conflict in Public Participation

November 5 2026

Welcome & Introductions

IAP2USA

Our Vision:

We envision a country where public participation is deeply embedded and widely applied and where equitable, efficient, and informed decision-making processes improve the quality of our democracy.

Our Mission:

IAP2USA leads, advances and advocates for best practices in public participation.

Today's Agenda

- Reflection / Keep in Mind
- SFMTA: Example, introduced
- Core Values: Conflict Possibilities / Questions to ask
- SFMTA: Example, continued
- Q&A
- Stay in touch!

Reflection / Keep In Mind

01

Think of a recent engagement effort of your agency— water, energy, community services, public safety or health, education, land use, mobility, resilience?

02

What you're hearing about that project's engagement?

Share in chat.

03

Keep that project in mind as we share today's information to see what ideas could reinforce what's working or improve its effectiveness

Biggest challenges IAP2 members are facing

(IAP2 USA 2026 member survey)



Overview

01

Situation

- Increasing polarization
- Declining trust & overlapping issues
- Engagement fatigue
- Myths and Risks about p2

02

Opportunity

Local government consistently ranks as the most trusted tier of American government.

03

Resources

Principles and approaches exist:

- Real life examples
- Core Values
- What to notice/ask about what to do about the conflicts

Our Goals Today

01

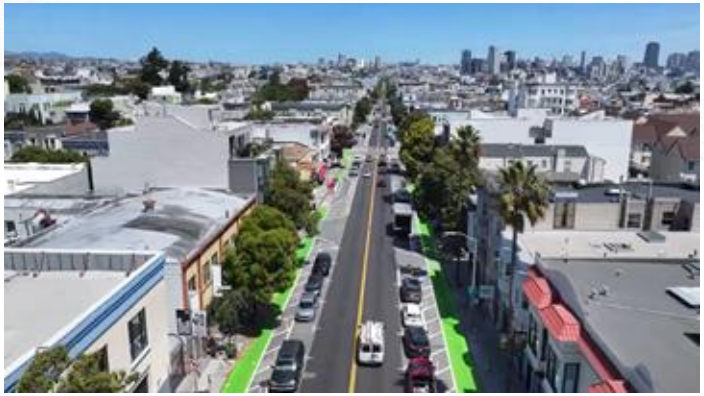
Identify process issues with engagement that can cause conflict or create risks to manage

02

Help you identify the right engagement process improvements to make.

03

Help you build trust and reduce conflict with your engagement



San Francisco's Valencia Bikeway Project

Outreach & Engagement Example





Pervasive Collision Issues

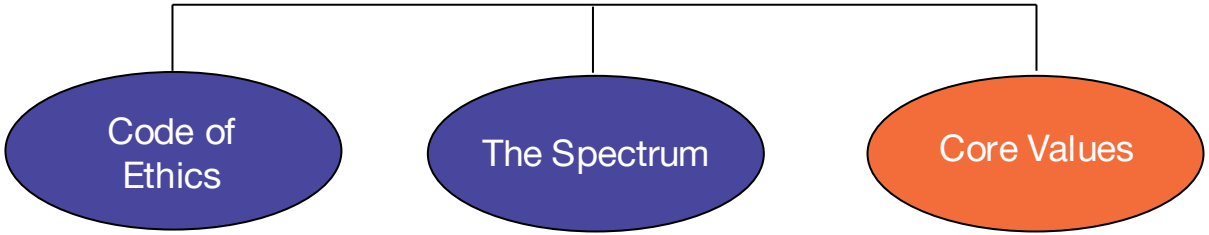
- Tried center-running bikeway pilot
- Mandated to move to a traditional side-running bikeway
- Strong voices for/against both designs



Challenge:

How does the SFMTA conduct comprehensive and earnest public outreach/engagement when mandated to move from one unpopular bikeway design to another?

Framework: IAP2's 3 Pillars



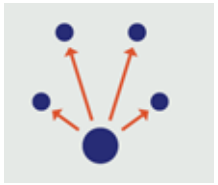
about the practitioner

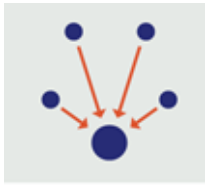
about how much influence we share

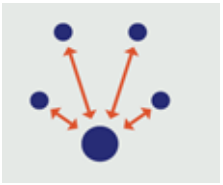
about the participation/ engagement process

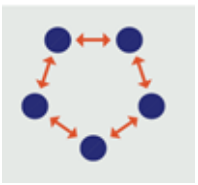
IAP2 Pillars: The Spectrum

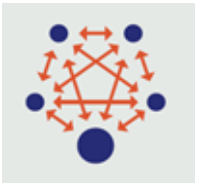
Engagement can have different levels of influence.





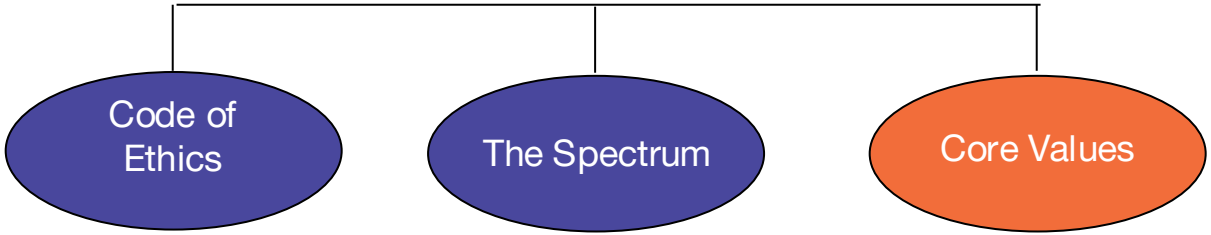






level	**inform**	**consult**	**involve**	**collaborate**	**empower**
promise	we will keep you informed	+ listen to and show how input considered	+ include input directly in alternatives	+ your advice & recommend ations in solutions	+ we will implement what you decide

IAP2: Core Values Deep Dive



Questions:

How do process issues present as conflict?

How can we improve our process to reduce or prevent conflict?

7 Core Process Values

1. Belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.
2. Includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
3. Promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
4. Seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
5. Seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
6. Provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
7. Communicates to participants how their input affected decision.

Core Value # 1: A Right

Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.

Potential Conflicts and Risks/Myths

- Expectations gap about the process
- Issues of fairness based on level of impact
- We think we already know everyone who will be impacted

Notice/Ask…

- Are we engaging or informing? How have we defined p2?
- What's our p2 policies? What resources flow from them? What staff capacities are needed?

Core Value #2: A Promise

Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.

Potential Conflicts and Risks/Myths

- Misunderstandings and frustrations about how much influence is being shared
- Confusion about what's negotiable to comment on / influence

Notice/Ask…

- What level of influence are we promising? (Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, Empower
- What's "negotiable"?
- **In Chat:** How are we creating transparency around what level of influence we are promising?

Core Value #3: Needs and Interests

Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.

Potential Conflicts and Risks/Myths

- Balancing needs/ interests
- Lack of understanding about needs/interests of the organization
- The organization already know what the community wants

Notice/Ask…

- How do we acknowledge and share the needs and interests of participants? Of the organization?
- Do we proceed if we have missing voices?
- How do we identify and seek out missing voices?

Core Value #4: Proactive

Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.

Potential Conflicts and Risks/Myths

- Legacy issues around trust or community not knowing what happened to their input in past project
- Decisions have unintended consequences
- "If people don't show up, they must not care"

Notice/Ask…

- How do we know we've engaged the most impacted and least heard?
- What do we do if needed voices aren't participating?
- How do we repair trust?
- **In chat:** How are we making it easier to engage with us? What would we need to know to do so?

Core Value #5: Designing Engagement

Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.

Potential Conflicts and Risks/Myths

- Misinterpreting lack of participation for lack of interest or concern: “We held an open house but no one came”
- Using the same methods out of pattern and practice, not out of effectiveness

Notice/Ask…

- Is engagement planning happening ***before*** methods are set? How flexible are we with the methods we use?
- Do our methods reflect ways our community ***wants*** to participate?
- How do we evaluate and adapt our methods?

Core Value #6: Information

Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.

Potential Conflicts and Risks/Myths

- Community surprised about what is happening
- There's confusion about what information is true
- Jargon versus plain language makes it hard to understand and use information provided

Notice/Ask…

- What resources does the community trust? Who are trusted messengers?
- How do we address new topics that arise as the project progresses?
- **In chat:** How do we know what information the community would find most helpful?

IAP2 Core Value 7: Feedback Loop

Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

Potential Conflicts and Risks/Myths

- People saying, “I don’t know what happened with my input in the past, so I won’t participate now.”
- Lack of understanding of why some input used and other input not used

Notice/Ask…

- What resources to report out trusted and used by the community?
- Are you reporting out throughout the project?
- Is input tied to decisions? (“If not, why not” report)
- Is a missing feedback loop from the past causing trust issues now?



What Kind of Outreach did SFMTA Perform on Valencia?

20,000 touchpoints with the public, including:

- Connecting with 12,000+ residents
- Holding 2 community open houses
- Inviting merchants to 4 charrette sessions (co-design), 10 informational events, and numerous corridor tours
- Creating a Construction Working Group to advise on minimizing disruptions

How Did SFMTA Apply Core Values to C



- CV1: Co-designed new bikeway with the community
- CV2: Ensured the public's contribution directly influenced new design
- CV3: Tailored outreach to nuanced needs and interests of cyclists, walkers, merchants, and residents
- CV4: Dug deep into community to find quieter voices that were not as obvious to engage
- CV5: Created charrettes workshop to create parking design together, defining participation parameters
- CV6: Weekly updates via web, email, SMS, etc. on the project progress
- CV7: Connected the dots for constituents on how one conversation changed an element of the project



Results

- <u>Not everyone was happy…and that's okay!</u>
- National & international media attention
- Fewer collisions!
- Multiple industry awards
  - ITE Western District - Project of the Year
  - IAP2 Core Value Awards - US Project of the Year

Core Values:

Share Out What stands out to you?

1. Belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.

2. Includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.

3. Promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.

4. Seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.

5. Seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.

6. Provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.

7. Communicates to participants how their input affected decision.

What It Means to Take On Core Values

01

- Sends message to community about having a principled and practical approach
- Creates accountability for everyone involved

02

- Guides process design and adaptations
- Opens a way to begin evaluating your agency's p2 practice

03

- Equips your team with resource to build their confidence, which can be furthered through trainings
- Sets expectations for consultants as well

Thank you! Stay in touch

01

- Erin Zimmermann
  Erin@iap2usa.org
- pillars:
  https://iap2usa.wildapricot.org/cvs
- training calendar:
  https://tinyurl.com/3w6xm5hb

02

- Cathy Smith
  Cathy@incommon.online
- https://www.linkedin.com/in/cathy-smith-5846193

03

- Bobby Lee
  Bobby.Lee1@SFMTA.com
- IAP2 Core Values Award:
  https://www.iap2usa.org/sys/website/?pageId=1857389