

ENGAGEMENT METHODS

Meaningful community engagement is a process that actively involves community members in decisions that affect them, giving them genuine opportunities to influence outcomes rather than simply being informed after decisions have already been made.

At its core, meaningful engagement is about listening, collaboration, transparency, and shared ownership.

It intentionally involves people from diverse backgrounds, ages, neighborhoods, cultures, and lived experiences, especially those who are often underrepresented.

Community members are engaged from the beginning of a project, not just asked to react to a final proposal.

For a Civic Commons & Resilience Center meaningful community engagement might include:

- Community Listening Sessions
- Community surveys to gather broad input
- Community Listening Sessions
- Pop-up outreach at farmers markets, parks, and festivals
- Focus groups with youth, seniors, businesses, and nonprofits
- Community design workshops to co-create ideas
- A Community Advisory Committee providing ongoing guidance
- Public review of draft plans and recommendations
- Regular updates showing how community input shaped decisions

For a Civic Commons & Resilience Center, meaningful community engagement is not just a planning activity. It is the foundation for building a center that reflects community values, strengthens trust, fosters belonging, and enhances the community's long-term resilience.

1. COMMUNITY LISTENING SESSIONS

WHAT IS A LISTENING SESSION? A listening session is a structured meeting or forum where leaders, organizations, boards, or public officials primarily listen to participants' views, concerns, experiences, and suggestions rather than presenting information or making decisions. The goal is to gather input, understand perspectives, and build trust.

Common Features

- *Participants are invited to share opinions and experiences.*
- *Facilitators ask open-ended questions.*
- *The emphasis is on listening, not debating.*
- *Notes or themes are recorded for later consideration.*
- *Decisions are usually not made during the session.*

HERE: A series of listening sessions will be conducted throughout the planning period.

Topics will include:

- Community resilience needs

- Emergency preparedness priorities
- Food and water security
- Energy resilience
- Public gathering spaces
- Resource sharing and mutual aid
- Climate adaptation strategies

Sessions will be held at accessible community locations and at various times, including evenings and weekends.

Target Participation

- Minimum of 8 listening sessions
- 15-30 participants per session
- Representation from all priority populations

2. COMMUNITY SURVEY (1/2 COMPLETED 1/2 AFTER AWARD OF FUNDS)

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY SURVEY? *A community survey is a structured way to gather opinions, needs, preferences, and feedback from people who live, work, study, or spend time in a community. Organizations such as local governments, libraries, schools, nonprofits, and neighborhood groups use community surveys to better understand what matters to residents and to help guide decisions.*

What a community survey typically measures

- Resident satisfaction with local services
- Community priorities and concerns
- Needs for programs, facilities, or resources
- Demographic information (age, household size, etc.)
- Opinions about future plans or projects

HERE: A multilingual survey will gather broader input from residents unable to attend meetings.

The survey will be available:

- Online
- In paper format
- At community events
- Through partner organizations

Information gathered will include:

- Resilience concerns
- Desired CRC services
- Emergency preparedness needs
- Accessibility requirements
- Volunteer interests

Target Participation

- Minimum 300 completed surveys

3. *POP-UP OUTREACH*

WHAT IS "POP-UP OUTREACH"? *Pop-up outreach is a strategy where an organization temporarily sets up a presence in places where people already gather, rather than expecting them to come to the organization.*

Possible Objectives

- *Increase awareness of the Civic Commons and Resilience Center.*
- *Gather community input on programs, services, and facility design.*
- *Identify community assets, needs, and resilience priorities.*
- *Recruit volunteers and partners.*
- *Connect residents to emergency preparedness and support resources.*
- *Foster civic participation and community belonging.*

HERE: Good Pop-Up Locations

- Farmers markets
- Community festivals
- Library events
- Schools and college campuses
- Parks and trails
- Senior centers
- Neighborhood association meetings
- Faith communities
- Local business districts

Sample Activities

Community Survey

- What community resources do you value most?
- What challenges concern you most (wildfire, flooding, housing, isolation, food security)?
- What programs would you like to see at the Resilience Center?

Interactive Engagement

- Community mapping exercise
- "Vision Wall" with sticky notes
- Preparedness checklist station
- Resilience pledge board
- Youth drawing or design activity

Information Sharing

- Emergency preparedness materials

- Information about cooling centers and disaster resources
- Upcoming workshops and events
- Volunteer opportunities

Here: For a library, pop-up outreach might include setting up a table or booth at:

- Farmers markets
- Community festivals
- Parks
- Schools
- Senior centers
- Local businesses
- Neighborhood events

Goals of pop-up outreach

- Reach people who do not regularly use the library
- Increase awareness of services and programs
- Build relationships with the community
- Gather feedback through surveys or conversations
- Sign up new library card holders

Project staff and volunteers will conduct outreach at:

- Farmers markets
- Community events
- Schools
- Food distribution sites
- Senior centers
- Neighborhood gatherings

This approach helps reach individuals who do not typically attend public meetings.

4. *FOCUS GROUPS*

WHAT IS A FOCUS GROUP? A **focus group** is a small, guided discussion with a selected group of people that is used to gather detailed feedback, opinions, experiences, and ideas about a specific topic.

Unlike a survey, which collects responses from many people through questions, a focus group allows participants to discuss issues in depth and build on one another's comments.

Typical Characteristics

- 6 to 12 participants
- Led by a trained facilitator
- Lasts 60 to 90 minutes
- Uses open-ended questions

- *Encourages discussion and interaction*

HERE: A Civic Commons and Resilience Center project might use focus groups to:

- Explore community needs and priorities.
- Understand barriers to civic participation.
- Test ideas for programs and services.
- Gather detailed feedback on facility design.
- Learn how different groups define "community resilience."

Potential Focus Groups

- Seniors
- Youth and young adults
- Families with children
- Local business owners
- Nonprofit organizations
- Emergency preparedness volunteers
- Library users
- Low-income residents
- Community leaders
- Residents from underrepresented neighborhoods

Sample Questions for a Civic Commons & Resilience Center

1. What community spaces do you currently use and why?
2. What services or programs are missing in Sebastopol?
3. What does community resilience mean to you?
4. How could a Civic Commons support residents during emergencies?
5. What activities would make you more likely to use the Center?
6. What concerns or challenges should the Center address?

Advantages

- Rich, detailed feedback
- Ability to ask follow-up questions
- Reveals motivations and concerns
- Generates new ideas
- Builds community ownership of the project

Limitations

- Small number of participants
- Results are not statistically representative
- Strong personalities can influence discussion
- Requires skilled facilitation

5. COMMUNITY DESIGN WORKSHOPS

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY DESIGN WORKSHOP? *Community design workshops are interactive public sessions where residents, stakeholders, and project leaders work together to develop ideas, priorities, and design concepts for a community project, space, program, or facility. Rather than simply asking for feedback on a finished proposal, community design workshops involve participants in creating solutions and shaping the project's direction.*

HERE: Residents will participate in planning and design workshops to help determine:

- CRC features and services
- Emergency hub functions
- Program priorities
- Facility design elements
- Accessibility improvements
- Community programming

Participants will review concepts and provide recommendations that directly inform project decisions.

For a Civic Commons and Resilience Center, community design workshops often occur after initial outreach and surveys:

1. **Community Survey** → Gather broad input.
2. **Pop-Up Outreach** → Reach diverse community members.
3. **Focus Groups** → Explore issues in depth.
4. **Community Design Workshops** → Co-create solutions and design concepts.
5. **Draft Plan Review** → Present recommendations and refine.

6. COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE? *A Community Advisory Committee (CAC) is a group of residents, stakeholders, and community leaders appointed or convened to provide ongoing guidance, feedback, and community perspectives during the planning, development, and operation of a Civic Commons & Resilience Center. The committee serves as a bridge between the project team and the broader community, helping ensure that the center reflects local needs, values, and priorities.*

HERE: The Community Advisory Committee would provide community-based guidance and recommendations for the planning and development of the Civic Commons & Resilience Center. The committee serves in an advisory capacity, helping ensure that the center reflects community priorities, promotes resilience, fosters civic engagement, and serves residents of all ages and backgrounds.

A Community Advisory Committee helps to:

- Represent diverse community interests and perspectives
- Advise on plans, programs, and priorities
- Review community engagement findings
- Provide feedback on designs, policies, and operations

- Identify partnerships and funding opportunities
- Build public trust and transparency
- Champion the project within the community

The committee may:

- Review survey, focus group, and outreach results
- Advise on community priorities
- Help shape the center's mission and vision
- Recommend programs and services
- Provide input on facility design and amenities
- Assist with public outreach
- Evaluate project progress and outcomes

NOTE:

*For a Civic Commons and Resilience Center, surveys, pop-up outreach, and focus groups work best together: surveys tell you what people think, focus groups tell you why they think it, and pop-up outreach helps you reach people who might not otherwise participate.