

Dane County Community Development

Division of Extension

Public Engagement

Citizen engagement in the workings of government is critical to open, transparent, engaged governance. Elected officials have responsibility to represent citizens, but they can only do so if they are informed by, and connected to their constituency. Increasingly, government is being asked to engage citizens in dialogue and problem solving before issues early in the process of decision making. This page will provide tools and techniques for public engagement and involvement with elected bodies of governance.

The **University of Wisconsin's Local Government Center** provides training and guidance in deliberative governance. Their web site contains a range of resources on how to promote public engagement.

The **US Environmental Protection Agency's Public Participation Guidebook** details elements of public participation planning and implementation processes. While designed for environmental groups, the guidebook can also be utilized for a wide range of public participation processes and audiences.

For information on public participation and the values that guide it, see the **International Association for Public Participation**.

****Hosting a Community Conversation ****

Members of the Dane County Board of Supervisors were interested in improving public participation processes utilized by the Board, and to this end hosted a community event called "Community Conversation: Ideas for Dane County's Future." The session was devised as a pilot to test an open public participation process. The pilot session was held in June, 2015 in Middleton (west of Madison). Supervisors invited select participants to represent diverse constituent groups. Participants learned about the role of county government, and then engaged in small group discussions that focused on public input techniques and issues for the county. The planning group developed a manual that provides detail on how to plan and host a community event that invites public participation before an issue becomes divisive, and which provides opportunities for constituents to engage in conversations with each other, and with Supervisors, about new and developing issues. Below are links to the manual, and to the comments from participants at the pilot conversation.

Planning and Hosting a Community Conversation: A How to Manual

Dane County 2015 Community Conversation: Ideas for Dane County's Future

An EEO/AA employer, University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming, including Title VI, Title IX, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act requirements.