

# NEW ORLEANS Citizen Participation Project

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## Tool Kit and Information Packet



***A Guide to Developing a Formal Citizen Participation Process***

**About this Toolkit:** This toolkit is intended for use by the People of New Orleans and others who will work to develop a CPP for the city of New Orleans. It is available both in a “hard” paper format and as an interactive tool on the New Orleans Citizen Participation Website. It will be regularly updated with new information and case studies. It is laid out to provide useful and practical information to local leadership, neighborhood/community organizations and residents.

### **Mission Statement**

The mission of the Citizen Participation Program (CPP) is to enable citizens to effectively participate in city government's priority-setting and decision-making, and to give government officials a clearly defined way to communicate with the people. CPP is a tool to establish a continuing dialog between communities, neighborhoods, and city government, taking into account the rights and needs of all communities and striving towards consensus-based decision-making structure that benefits the city as a whole.

New Orleans Citizen Participation Project

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A Project of the  
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# New Orleans Citizen Participation Project

## Setting the Context

The purpose of this toolkit is to give community and neighborhood residents more background on what a formal Citizen Participation Process [CPP] looks like. The toolkit is intended to help facilitate discussions and study groups with neighbors on the various components and issues to consider as we come together to design a CPP system for New Orleans. It will set out the context of our city-wide campaign by providing a step by step guide to moving our Citizen Participation Project from concept to adoption by the City Council.

Since the early 1990s, the issue of increasing participation has become central to improving governance, transparency and combating local corruption. Participation is recognized as a means of ensuring an informed citizenry and for pursuing a collective vision for community development. It exposes the public space, allowing every stakeholder the opportunity to monitor the planning and implementation of city services. Participation enables collective action and builds community identity by enabling every member to identify the path from public processes to recognizable results and outcomes. Through citizen participation programs, the boundaries of responsibility and action are rendered visible easily identifying who is accountable. In addition, participation limits the corruption which tends to thrive in closed political systems. But we will have to do more than just invite all people to take part. True democracy requires steps to ensure that the voices of the powerful are not unduly elevated, that equity remains and guiding principle and goal.

*“The only way we are going to have the services we want is through effective involvement.”*

*-Catherine Staite, UK Participatory Budget Participant-*

**Formal Citizen Participation** is both a means to an end, and a goal itself. A Citizen Participation Program [CPP] is a tool for individuals, communities and neighborhoods to have greater access and impact on the policies and actions of our city government. The goal is to increase transparency, accountability, understanding and social inclusion in local government affairs. It is a way for people and city government to work together to establish local priorities, create and implement solutions to our common issues. By “formal” we mean a system that is legally recognized by local officials and city residents as a tool for engagement and communication between the many sectors of our society. In practice, a CPP provides citizens with information that enables them to be engaged in prioritizing the needs of their neighborhoods and to propose and debate new services and projects and set budgets in a democratic and transparent way.

**What participation means for governments** There is growing agreement across society that local governments cannot (and should not) direct the actions of citizens without our cooperation. Whether in dealing with the impacts of climate change and coastal erosion, addressing public health concerns and infrastructure needs, or promoting local economic development, we are entering an era in which progress is only possible if individuals, communities and public services are each able and willing to contribute to the solution. For this to happen, public participation must become the core, not the counterpart, of the future of public service decision-making. Particularly since Hurricane Katrina, the people of New Orleans have grown less willing to defer decisions to local authorities without having some involvement in the conversation that leads to the eventual decisions. This means that the relationship between elected representatives and their constituents and between the institutions of the city government and the citizens

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must change. This is why participation is important to the public sector, and why an organized and formal system of Citizen Participation is vital to our continuing recovery and long-term development.

**Why is participation important to communities and neighborhoods?** As more people become interested in being a part of city decisions, we will need to ensure that access to those decisions are organized and maintained in a manner that is equitable and open to all. Currently, most public input processes are informal and ad hoc. A notice is published in a newspaper or sent to an email list and whoever is able or willing to show up is given responsibility for representing the neighborhood or in some cases the entire city.

However, what tends to happen despite the best intentions of local residents is that participants are not equipped nor given any real mandate to represent interests beyond their own, leaving many points of view excluded and unheard.

By creating a formal system for citizen engagement we will ensure that citizen involvement in local decisions is not dominated only by those with the greatest amount of resources, time and skill. Instead it becomes a process that empowers people and helps to improve communication within and between communities to find solutions to common issues.

In the future, if community and neighborhood groups want to be effective campaigners or advocates they will need to show how they have engaged with the communities involved. The CPP system will provide the resources and support necessary for them to outreach effectively. Further, by developing clear rules of engagement, residents can be confident that their participation will be valued in the larger discussion. These rules must be flexible enough to allow for adaptation to changing conditions and needs. This form of empowerment is central to giving people more control over their lives and can help government design and run public services that are better tailored to the people who use them. By contributing to consultations you can help government achieve:

- improved quality of services, e.g. health services, schools and local development
- greater community cohesion and social inclusion
- better overall conditions in the most deprived neighborhoods
- a thriving democracy, where decisions by local government are connected more closely with communities and individuals
- a vibrant civil society, with greater community involvement.

## History of the CPP in New Orleans

The intent to establish a formal CPP system for New Orleans pre-dates the disaster of Hurricane Katrina. In early 2004 at the request of the City Planning Commission (CPC), the Committee for a Better New Orleans/Metropolitan Area Committee (CBNO/MAC) conducted a series of public meetings which led to the creation of a Draft CPP model for the city. The outcome of this process was the creation of the 2004 Draft CPP Model for New Orleans which was followed by preliminary attempts to implement a pilot project in a few neighborhoods.

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In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, CBNO/MAC regrouped its efforts to create a CPP system for New Orleans but quickly realized that the increased civic awareness happening all around the city gave them an opportunity to reopen the discussion while inviting many more people to the table. Also it was proposed that the pre-Katrina model could be revised and enhanced to better suit the post-Katrina reality in the city. It became clear that the idea for greater citizen participation in the city's short term recovery and long term development was a central concern among city residents when in 2007 the final version Unified New Orleans Plan [UNOP] stated in Section 5.5 that;

*“A formal process for citizen engagement must be developed and implemented to facilitate neighborhood recovery and future development, and to ensure that citizens continue to have a voice in the City's future.”*

In 2007 a steering committee was formed to begin planning a continued process to re-engage city residents in a discussion about citizen participation and government accountability. Staff was hired in 2008 to lead the process which really kicked off in July of that year with the city's first **Citizen Participation Summit**. Since that time residents from across the city have participated in a series of dialogues meant to address important aspects of the development of a permanent CPP system. Issues such as;

- **Scope of Activities:** what are the range of issues a CPP will enable residents to be a part of?
- **Finance:** how will a permanent CPP system be funded and protected from political abuse? how much does a functioning CPP system cost?
- **Outreach and Inclusion:** what specific strategies should be adopted by the CPP system to ensure broad inclusion in the system? issues such as language access for non-English speakers, use of internet and community surveys to get input from those who can't attend meetings etc.
- **Organizational Structure:** how should the organizational map of the CPP be designed to both enable inclusiveness but also make an efficient process for people to be more informed and involved in city decisions?
- **Race, Gender and Class:** how do these social categories impact an individual or communities ability to access and influence public discussions about policy that impacts our communities?

These are just some of the major topics taken up by citizen volunteers in the CPP process.

In the fall of 2008, the City Planning Commission began a year long process to create the city's first Master Plan and Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance. Simultaneous with this process was a movement to amend the city's charter to give this new master plan the force of law. While the lines between those who supported and those who were against the timing of the amendment remain today, the CPP staff felt that whether the amendment passed or not at that time it would only serve to highlight further the need for a strong citizen engagement process in the city.

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As a result of the passing of the charter amendment the creation of a CPP is now mandated, giving the city a maximum of 18 months to establish a formal system of citizen engagement:

### **Section 5-411. Neighborhood Participation.**

*“The participation movement has the chance to make politics more relevant, to bring the issues alive for people. But this will only happen if we start to understand what good participation is, and build that capacity.”*

*-Patrick Diamond, UK  
Participatory Budget Activist-*

*The City shall establish by ordinance a system for organized and effective neighborhood participation in **land use decisions and other issues that affect quality of life.** It shall provide for timely notification to a neighborhood of any proposed Land Use Action affecting the neighborhood; it shall also provide the opportunity for meaningful neighborhood review of and comment on such proposals.*

What is clear from these trends is that the shift to more transparency and direct participation is a result of continued public input and pressure to see a politics that is more accessible

and responsive to local needs.

We hope that you will find this tool kit useful in understanding the background of our current CPP campaign as well as answer important questions for you as we go forward.



## About Citizen Participation Programs

**Formal Citizen Participation Programs [CPP]** have been around in the US and cities across the globe for over 30 years. The essence of what a CPP does is simple: it allows citizens to have a greater say in city government decision making and priority setting. In addition it gives local officials an effective means of communicating with residents and for receiving information back from them. However, it is not the only means of citizen communication with city government, nor is it a competitor with other forms of engagement and community organizing.

*“Rather than weaken representative democracy, engaging in participative processes strengthens the legitimacy of politicians, enabling them to be seen by members of the public as listening and responsive, leading to greater trust.”*

*-Debbie Wilkie, Scottish Civic Forum-*

CPP is **a** tool for people to use to communicate with their government and to enhance their ability to create and implement local projects to improve their community’s development. Citizen Participation entails several interrelated but distinct processes. These include;

- people being involved in decision-making,
- participating and contributing to the development of local agendas,
- and sharing in the benefits from these processes.

CPP does not replace existing structures of government nor reduce the role of existing legislative leaders and city departments. It does change the way government and city agencies conduct their business and make decisions. By moving government decision making from closed meetings to public forums, CPP allows residents to be aware of the activities of government, to monitor the allocation of city budgets and proposals for new developments before they occur.

Citizen Participation requires that neighborhood and community residents be enabled to take part in the planning and monitoring of public or private developments, projects and programs. By creating a formal channel to have needs addressed, a CPP can enhance civic engagement while improving the delivery and efficiency of local services.

Some see participation as very specific to a certain instance. Such as getting input on a particular project or proposal for a new development or initiative comes to mind. Others tend to see participation as

a process that broadens peoples' sense of citizenship and rights. Participation can also expand peoples' understanding of their society, their role in it and how they can work with other communities to solve many pressing issues, or just make new friends and social contacts. A healthy democracy needs the capacity to involve its citizens in key decisions. Public involvement in their government should not be limited to only weighing in on Election Day. People from all walks of life should be encouraged to wrestle with tough questions, seek common ground, and develop and articulate their views. In this context, policymakers should see themselves as part of this larger process, not as a world unto themselves.

There is no universal blueprint for creating a CPP system. Each city conducts its process in a different manner. However the many benefits of a formal CPP can be witnessed in many cities and countries across the world.

## Benefits of a CPP

There are many benefits of a CPP to for Residents, Government and Businesses; including:

### 1. Benefits for Residents:

- Gives citizens an opportunity to have direct input into city government priority setting and decision making.
- Ensures all citizens in the city have an equal opportunity to participate in the process.
- Communicates neighborhood needs and problems directly to various city agencies and departments.
- Neighborhoods receive information about projects, developments and other issues that impact them directly from city government.
- Helps neighborhoods address certain problems on their own.
- Gives citizens more access to information about city government and government services.
- Provides a training ground for future city leaders.

### 2. Benefits for Government:

- Provides a regular mechanism for collecting citizen input on proposals that need to be brought before the public, like the **Master Plan**.
- Provides city hall with a way to confirm citizens' needs and priorities, and provides the knowledge that the citizens voices heard are truly representative of their communities.
- Uses validated citizen input to counter pressure from special interests.
- It is a more effective way of speaking to and hearing from their constituents.

- Provides a clear conduit for information about city programs, services, and initiatives, rather than relying on simply printing that information in the legal notices section of a news paper.

**3. Benefits for Businesses:**

- Creates a formal structure for businesses and developers to work with neighborhoods and residents on construction, new business and business expansion projects.
- Builds predictability in government permit and approval processes, and reduces opportunities for delays and other government abuses of these processes.

## What can a CPP do?

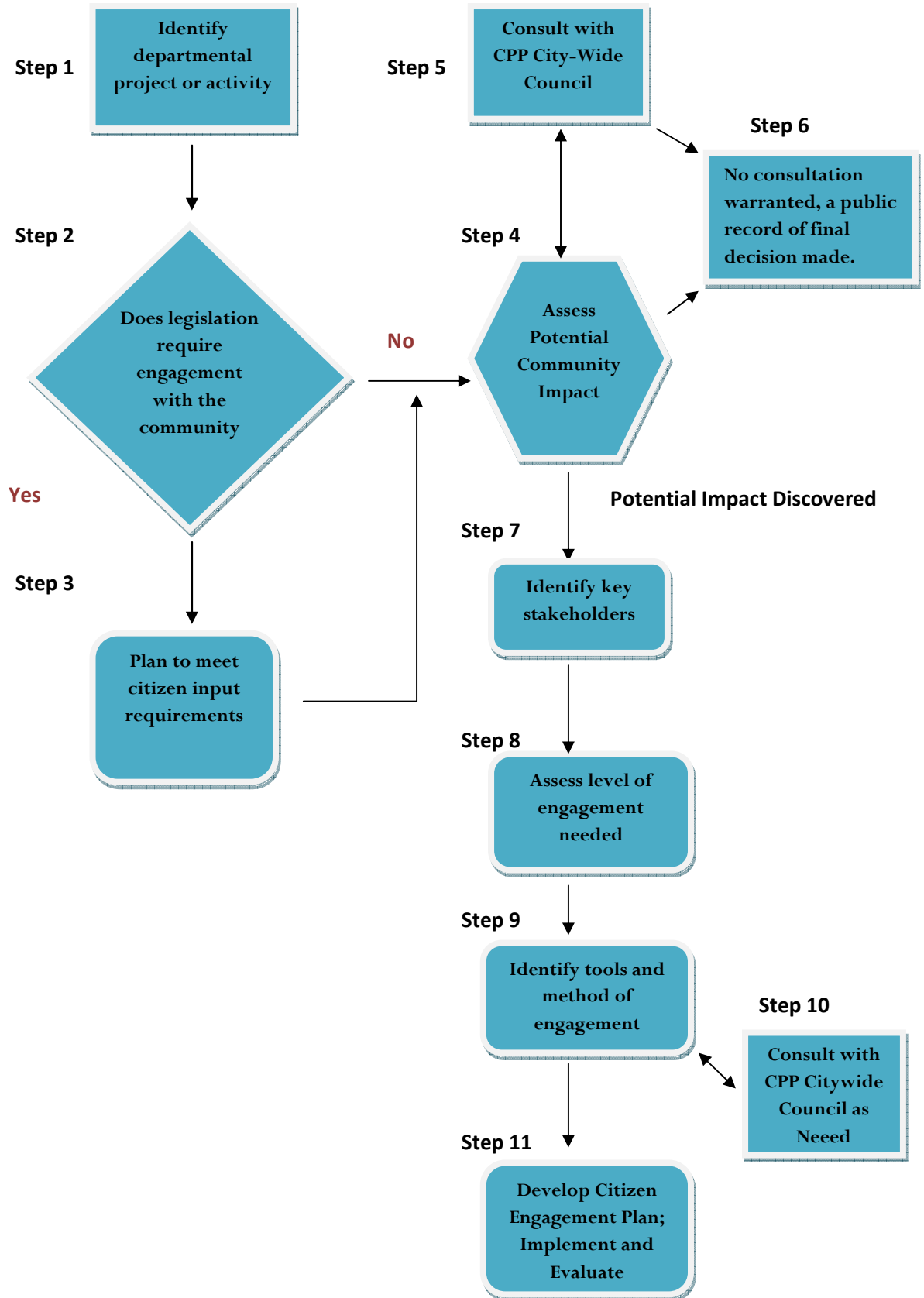
What a CPP does and how it functions is the most important question to address when designing a new citizen engagement system. Unfortunately, it is often the most neglected due to the levels of uncertainty and the need for clear support from leading actors and stakeholders who ultimately will have to carry out the mandate of the system.

In the simplest form, CPP's are a means of ensuring greater citizen involvement and accountability in those decisions made by city government and its departments that impact the quality of life of city residents and the use of public resources, whether physical or financial. Setting these rules for public participation and communicating them widely is a key to the success of a CPP system. Residents need to have trust that the process will be consistent in order to justify their commitment of time to public participation.

This doesn't mean the CPP is not flexible to a variety of circumstances, only that consistent standards be met to encourage meaningful involvement and equity in the process. Participation however should be viewed as extending throughout the life of a project or activity rather than being a "one time" exercise or "add-on." It should begin early in the planning stage. While most projects are suited to some level of community engagement, some projects may allow a greater level of involvement than others. It is necessary, therefore, to carefully evaluate each pending departmental decision, per the instructions in this manual, to help plan your engagement strategy.

The goal of the CPP system is to organize public participation so that individuals or groups don't feel as if the public input process is a competition among competing interests to be included on a pre-determined agenda or decision. Instead, the CPP should be seen as organizing public engagement to create an opportunity for dialogue and community building to develop a common agenda. It will do this by guaranteeing visible standards of participation, outreach and decision-making. For instance the city of Minneapolis designed a very useful flow model of their citizen engagement decision-making process.

**Minneapolis Flow Chart of Citizen Engagement**

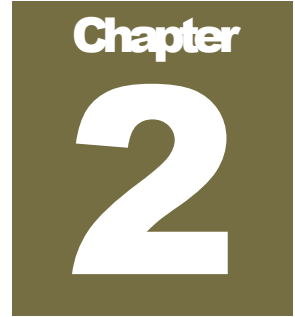


The Minneapolis model shown above gives a good visual representation of how rules for public decision-making can be clarified and inclusive of community input when acted upon by city agencies and public officials.

### **Conclusion**

What a formal CPP system represents is the opening up of new democratic spaces for citizens to be more engaged in the function of their government. Throughout the world people are recognizing that despite the benefits of representative democracy through voting, many people still feel disconnected from and cynical about the ability of local governments to address their needs. With falling voter participation rates, local governments are seeking new ways to engage city residents and increase involvement in local government processes.

Although many CPP systems were designed to help meeting federal guidelines in areas of resource management, specifically CDBG funds; people are now expecting to be more involved in helping to shape laws and policies that impact them as well. This requires developing a CPP system that is strongly accountable, inclusive and offers equitable representation. We now turn to the major issues the CPP is addressing in designing the New Orleans system.



## How Are CPPs Organized?

Although citizen participation models exist in cities from Portland, Oregon to Porto Alegre, Brazil, and are as diverse as Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota and Manchester, UK, most CPPs, particularly those in the U.S., are organized around geographic units such as Neighborhood Associations. All residents of a neighborhood can be members of the association. Other citizens who work or own properties or businesses in the area are typically invited to attend meetings and express their views; but they are often not eligible to vote or hold an office in the Association. The neighborhood is the center for social, economic and political activity for most people. It is widely understood that people in neighborhoods are excellent judges of their community's priorities, as in the famous analogy of the policy shoe; *"The citizen wearing the shoe is better able to tell where it pinches than the maker of the shoe."*

CPP systems in the U.S. are typically developed around some form of neighborhood or other geographic based division of the city into distinct units. Starting with neighborhood associations, which provide the most immediate forum for participation of local residents, these engagement systems attempt to incorporate more organized citizen voice in local decisions and funding distributions. In these programs, neighborhoods are typically grouped into regional or district councils which enable residents to address issues that extend beyond neighborhood boundaries. Finally most these systems narrow to a city-wide body of residents either appointed or elected by neighborhood groups to be the immediate link to local government.

Recently however, many cities are recognizing that limiting the CPP system to geographically defined neighborhood groups leaves out important segments of the community who engage in civic life through different types of organizations. In addition, issues of (mis)trust, particularly in neighborhoods of high ethnic and religious diversity that are left un-addressed often act as barriers to collective identity and problem solving at the neighborhood level which can limit participation in local neighborhood groups.

Defining **who** participates in a CPP and **how** is of the utmost importance to consider when creating a new system. Many cities around the country are struggling with the issue of how to open

their systems to traditionally excluded social groups after so many years of operating their CPP system completely around neighborhoods. Here in New Orleans, we have an opportunity to design our system taking these issues into account from the beginning.

## Developing a CPP Locally: Integrating Neighborhood and Communities

Throughout the New Orleans CPP discussions, our residents have committed themselves to creating a system that was fully accessible and offered the widest opportunities for engagement. The CPP Organizational Structure Team developed an organizational map of the CPP that attempts to bridge the opportunities of organizing within neighborhoods as well as among various social groups. Neighborhood Associations remain central to the function of the CPP, but there is growing recognition that they can't improve our city alone despite tremendous efforts.

With this in mind, local residents developed a structure for the CPP that includes definitions and distinct roles for "Neighborhoods" and "Communities of Interest". "**Neighborhood**" is defined as a geographically based community or region of a city. "**Communities of Interest**" are social groups such as Ethnic or Faith Based community groups, and issue defined groups such as Education Committees, Youth organizations, or Renters.

The structure begins with Neighborhood and Community Based groups at the grassroots level. The **Neighborhood Association**, the most basic level of direct involvement is an autonomous organization formed by people for the purpose of considering and acting on issues affecting the human development and sustainability of their Neighborhood.

Neighborhoods are then encouraged to form **District Neighborhood Councils**, which are a grouping neighborhood associations into a regional coalition. The District Neighborhood Councils help to coordinate the activities of the CPP system, ensuring standards are being met for participation, outreach and democratic decision-making. In addition these District Councils are responsible for communicating important information from city government agencies to the neighborhood and community based groups registered within that region. It was suggested that our District Councils incorporate pre-existing neighborhood coalitions such as the Carrolton Area Network, East New Orleans Neighborhood Advisory Council, Gentilly Civic Improvement Association, and the Algiers Council of Presidents. Forming district or regional neighborhood groups based on these pre-existing institutions empowers local communities without having to conform to any one district formula such as the Planning, City Council, or Public School districts.

The District Neighborhood Councils will enable neighborhoods to come together to address issues that extend across neighborhood boundaries. It will also allow smaller neighborhoods to work with neighbors to address common issues more effectively. These District Neighborhood Councils will be tasked with facilitating information flows between the Neighborhood Organizations and the

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CPP, and also be responsible for compiling and disseminating neighborhood level data and coordinating public meetings on issues impacting the area.

**Community Councils** on the other hand might include non-profit service and/or advocacy groups, church groups, issue-oriented groups or their representatives, will be grouped together into larger thematic councils, such as: “Education”, “Housing” or “Public Transportation”.

We anticipate that the life span of some Community Councils will be constant (such as education), whereas others should be flexible allowing us to respond to situations as they arise within the city, and be disbanded when the issues are no longer as pressing.

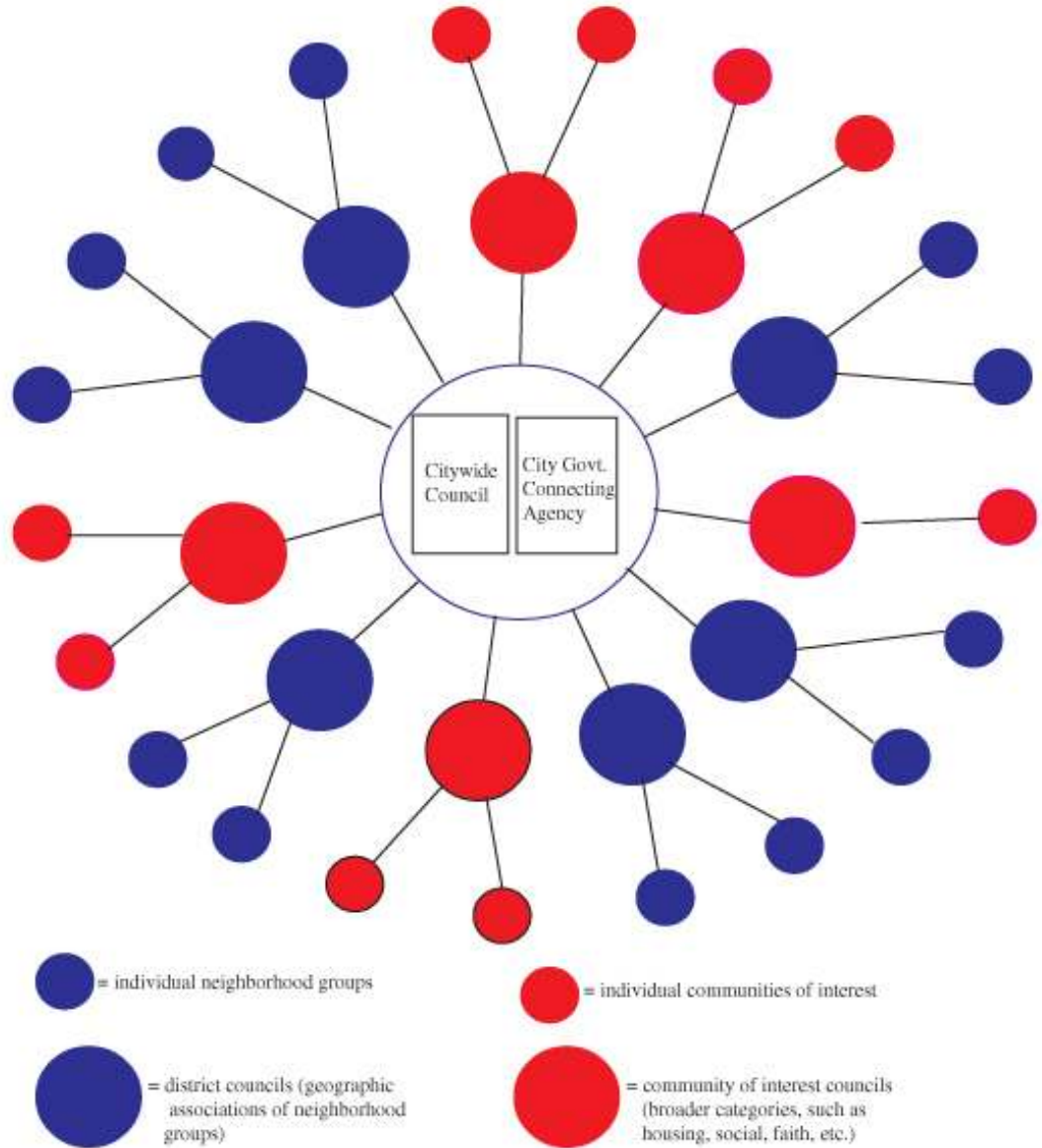
Community of Interest organizations often have skills and expertise that neighborhood associations may lack, particularly when they are newly formed. Community of Interest organizations are more likely to have experience either in direct service delivery, grassroots organizing or advocacy. Neighborhood Associations should see community groups as potential resources to help reach targeted segments of the neighborhood. They can also be important partners to address the local service needs of specific populations who may not be fully represented in neighborhood meetings.

Community of Interest groups should also see Neighborhood Associations as potential allies in getting across important messages and perspectives about policy. The neighborhood association is a grassroots neighborhood level institution that Community of Interest groups can utilize to help reach their targeted constituency. Neighborhoods can also serve as a reminder to interest groups of the importance of place and space in determining quality of life. Finally, community organizations should help facilitate the integration of traditionally excluded groups and voices into neighborhood level discussions.

Neighborhood and Community Groups will both be encouraged to register with their appropriate councils in order to be a part of the CPP system, receive information and be formally included in public discussions and outreach plans.

Creating a more inclusive city will require deliberate strategies to make sure all New Orleanians have the opportunity to be involved. This means supporting under-represented groups to overcome the social and structural barriers that have prevented them from getting involved in the past. We will need to provide neighborhood organizations and City agencies with the tools and resources they need to more effectively reach out and build bridges with under-represented communities. And we will need to support leadership development and organizing within under-represented communities to enable them to enter into civic life with a strong voice so that they can participate on an equal footing.

## Citizen Participation Program Model Molecular Version



## Addressing NIMBYism in Citizen Participation

Many CPP systems around the country are struggling with the fact that neighborhood associations can tend to focus solely on local level issues while showing less interest in broader discussions about local social policies at the city level.

Similarly, when social issues occur at the neighborhood level the instinctive reaction of some to problems at that level is to attempt to remove ‘disturbances’ from their neighborhood. Such an approach is often seen as one of NIMBYism or Not in My Back Yard approaches to addressing issues.

What this approach to neighborhood problem solving often amounts to is just displacing the “problems” to another neighborhood. In efforts to eradicate problems from the neighborhood, communities sometimes support actions that ultimately are not even in their own best interest. For example, a park or facility is asked to restrict its hours to keep out "undesirable elements", which in turn curtails the ability of neighborhood residents to make use of the same facility.

Involving Communities of Interest groups that may work directly with these populations in the CPP system can help Neighborhood groups learn new ways of integrating people into the community while improving the living conditions for all who live there, both formally and sometimes informally. After all, the problems and solutions are not confined to specific populations on specific streets in specific neighborhoods; they exist across our city and remedies focused on displacing “problems” may only increase feelings of social exclusion and isolation making neighborhood issues more intractable.

## How Might a CPP Work?

*“Instead of seeing themselves as separate interest groups each trying to influence potential decision-makers, residents can begin to see themselves as part of a larger community and create solutions to issues through deliberation.”*

**Example I:** There is a proposal for a new multi-family apartment building in a neighborhood called Milbanks and a developer has approached the city’s planning commission for a building permit. The Milbanks’ neighborhood association will be notified immediately upon submission of the request for the building permit through the CPP’s **Early Notification System**. As required by the CPP, the neighborhood immediately impacted by the proposed development must be consulted and involved in the planning and design of the development.

Similarly the city’s Affordable Housing Community Council is also notified of the request for a building permit, as they are interested in to what extent the proposed housing will include affordable and low income units. This community based group would then know which neighborhood association they should contact and begin discussions with them.

The goal of this type of interaction would be to increase communication among residents in the city from various backgrounds and points of view. Instead of seeing themselves as separate interest groups each trying to influence potential decision-makers, they can begin to see themselves as part of a larger community and create solutions to issues through deliberation. This can help to strengthen the voice of residents, as opposed to the current situation where random interest groups and individuals bombard city officials with unorganized and often contradicting input.

Still, situations may arise where a neighborhood and community groups don't come to agreement. Each are still able to make separate appeals to the process and be assured of greater transparency into how that input is taken into account when final decisions are made.

*Example II:* The Cloverfield City Council on Aging [CoA] has just completed a survey of its Elderly clients about their ability to access public transportation in the city. The survey found, three specific areas lacking adequate public transportation stops, limiting the ability of the elderly population in these areas to be functional and independent. After cross-checking the addresses with the city's CPP map of neighborhood associations, the CoA discovered that the three target areas are within the boundaries of two adjacent neighborhoods.

Through the CPP database the CoA is able to get contact information of representatives of these neighborhood associations and request a meeting to discuss a strategy to urge the city's department of transportation to increase services in this area. After contacting the neighborhood groups, the CoA discovers that the issue of transportation is one the associations have been trying to improve for some time and welcome the support of a strong city-wide advocate like the CoA. Because the issue extends beyond the boundaries of an individual neighborhood, the District Neighborhood Council is tasked to help facilitate a discussion of local residents with the CoA to develop a proposal for the city's transportation department to increase services in the area during the next departmental planning cycle. In the meantime, the CoA works with the neighborhood associations to apply for a short term grant from the city to supply temporary shuttle services for seniors to shopping areas, medical and social service office appointments for a small fee.

## Civic Education for Effective Participation

“Civic Education is the learning for effective participation in democratic and development processes at both local and national levels”

Often missing from many discussions about public participation or civic engagement is the need for ongoing **Popular or Civic Education** to ensure effective participation in public discussions. Civic education is critical to empowering individuals and groups to be a part of a democratic process. By teaching people what their

individual and group rights actually are, civic education empowers them to act to realize those rights or react when they are violated. In addition, civic education can teach people to appreciate what their individual and collective responsibilities are to the wider society.

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Civic Education includes the following;

**Civic disposition** that involves citizens:

- Developing confidence to be able to participate in civic life
- Gaining experience participating in civic life
- Assuming the roles, rights and responsibilities associated with citizenship in democratic systems
- Being open, tolerant and responsible in exercising their rights and responsibilities

**Civic knowledge** which means citizens:

- Understand their political and civic context
- Know their social and economic rights as well as their political and civil rights
- Understand the roles, rights and responsibilities of citizens and government

**Civic skills** that involve citizens:

- Acquiring the ability to explain, analyze, evaluate, defend a position or proposal; and monitor its processes and outcomes
- Using knowledge for informed participation in civic and political processes

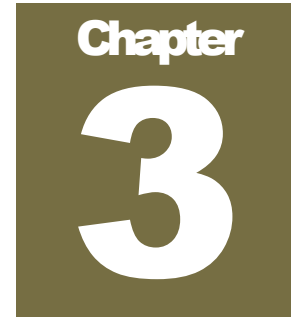
Ensuring equity in our Citizen Participation Program means always being mindful of how different groups access and benefit from service delivery. For example:

- Low levels of literacy can impede efforts at Civic Education.
- Apathy, cynicism and distrust in the goals and intent of Civic Education programs due to years of oppression, exploitation and marginalization.
- More pressing priorities – for some, Civic Education may appear to be an unaffordable and irrelevant luxury in the midst of a daily struggle for survival.
- Setting aside sufficient time to participate in Civic Education activities in the context of these pressing priorities will be a challenge, particularly for women and minorities. *Specific efforts will be needed to ensure that the relevance of Civic Education to improving living conditions is clear and that activities are organized to meet the needs of the target community, not the organizing entity.*

**Remember, Civic Education is:**

- 1) learning for effective participation in democratic and development processes at both local and national levels
- 2) essential for transforming people's lives and therefore a core part of the democratic governance
- 3) a key enabler for exercising civil, political, economic and social rights and for bringing about greater transparency and accountability
- 4) a prerequisite for stimulating, enhancing and deepening civic engagement

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## The Scope of Activities

Defining the scope of a CPP's activities helps to clarify exactly what the boundaries to the program are – what can really be achieved in practice – and thus define an appropriate and achievable purpose.

There are some basic questions to answer in defining scope: How much can really change? Where can we create points of entry for greater citizen involvement in city government? Establishing what can actually change as a result of participation, what is “up for grabs” is critical.

Defining this will require liaison with the decision-maker(s) and should result in a clear statement from them as to what the participation process can change. The International Association of Public Participation calls this the **“Promise to the Public”**.

Through our campaign we will have to decide and define what level of participation will best benefit our residents meet our city's needs for reformed governance?

The **Scope of Activity** within CPPs differs from city to city. In some CPP models the program only allows residents to address issues of land use and zoning. In others the range or Scope of Activity is much wider, including the allocation of city budgets, the delivery and access to public services such as health, education and transportation, as well as new investment and local economic development decisions.

Residents in New Orleans have suggested that they would not like to see their CPP system limiting their involvement to issues of land use and zoning. They challenge us to go beyond issues of revitalizing the physical neighborhood to rebuilding the social community that can enable us to pursue lives of value and purpose, not only in “problem” neighborhoods but everywhere. With this in mind the Scope of Activities team of CPP process defined three key areas that citizens want greater collaboration and consultation from city government. These areas are:

- Land Use/Zoning – Goal: For neighborhoods to have more impact on land use and zoning within their neighborhoods.

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**Example Atlanta:** In 1974 the City of Atlanta established its Neighborhood Planning Units system which consist of citizen advisory councils that make recommendations to the Mayor and City Council on zoning, land use, and other planning issues such as the Atlanta Strategic Action Plan. The city is divided into 25 neighborhood planning units, each of which is allowed to send 2 reps to a city-wide advisory group that makes recommendations to the Mayor and City Council.

- City Budgeting – Goal: Opening up the city budget to be more participatory, with opportunities for Neighborhoods/Community groups to help set spending priorities at city and departmental levels as well as access city funding for local projects and services.

**Example Los Angeles:** L.A. has developed the most extensive program to involve residents in the city's budget process in the U.S. The budget process kicks off in October with an event called, "The Mayor's Budget Day". This day is done simultaneously with an event termed the 'Congress of Neighborhoods'. On this day each of L.A.'s 81 neighborhood councils are asked to send 2 representatives to a city-wide budget forum and begin the discussion of the city budget and the training of the budget reps. Also at this time a city-wide budget survey begins to be distributed through internet, direct mail and through neighborhood councils. It gives the first impressions of the resident's priorities for the upcoming budget cycle. The results are delivered in January. On 31 January a "Regional Budget Day" meeting is held with each of the 2 neighborhood council reps groups into 7 geographic regions. Each of these 7 regions will then select 2 members to serve on the Regional Budget Rep committee which will take the final recommendations directly to the Mayor who must approve the budget by April 20.

- Program/Service Review – Goal: To create a system of metrics whereby the different programs, services and contracts provided by city government can be reviewed for efficiency and overall success in effective delivery and allocation.

**Example Dayton:** Dayton, Ohio's system of Priority Boards is perhaps the best example of citizen engagement with public services review. Dayton is divided into 6 neighborhood priority boards and one central business district board. The boards meet as much as twice monthly and through their involvement with the city's budgeting process have input at public hearing on program strategy for the city. They have also been able to give recommendations to the city about essential public services that may be faced with budget cuts and are a sounding board when city agencies are considering new policy proposals from areas ranging from garbage collection to housing rehabilitation.

The above examples of CPP scope of activities address specifically those areas that residents need more direct information and partnership with city government and agencies to enable greater involvement. There are numerous other issues or concerns that neighbor and community groups should be able to initiate and define themselves that require greater access and attention from city government.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, what type of CPP system is eventually adopted by our city will be the result of an active partnership and discussion between city officials and residents. People around the world are taking up the call for greater inclusion and transparency in their government. They are no longer content to be passive participants in their government, voting every few years to elect representatives to make decisions for them. People all over the world are taking greater action to ensure accountability by becoming directly involved in the discussions and decision-making processes that impact their lives. Collective deliberation on important issues can help us make better decisions and find solutions to persistent problems and conflicts that plague our societies. Also, becoming involved in a citizen participation system is a great way for local people to become more aware of those who live around them, to begin to see the issues that impact our community as their own and not just the problems of ‘other’ people. Still, there are still a number of challenges to overcome as we move closer to creating a CPP in New Orleans. Issues such as:

### **1. Complexity and bureaucracy**

Perhaps the greatest challenge of a new CPP system is the complexity of its organization. It is important to ensure that the system is not add-on layer of bureaucracy or another scheme but ‘builds on’ existing structures and processes. Experience shows that it takes a number of years to become effective and generate sufficient participation to achieve results. Its cost-efficiency in the early years is therefore questionable.

### **2. The need for strong commitment**

Citizen Participation requires strong commitment from all parties in order to work. Although it could be piloted in small areas, to work effectively it requires strong and confident administration which delivers action on the ground. There is a danger that the CPP can be seen simply as a slogan or rubber stamp program unless it provides significant influence to participants. Popular participation requires the sense that it is worthwhile getting involved.

### **3. The need for capacity building**

Community and Civil society groups require capacity building and support if they are to play a dynamic role in the local government processes. Civil servants and local authority officials also need ‘training’ concerning the principles and the practice of the Civic Engagement.

### **4. The need for time**

Participation in local governance appears to take some years to build. In cities where the model has been working for some time, people talk of the need to reach a ‘critical mass’ of participants, after which the system would be widely known and understood and begin to take a life of its own. This can take some time.

### **5. The danger of raising expectations**

There is also the danger that introduction of a CPP can raise the expectations of local residents beyond sustainable levels. Again, this requires very clear information and training in order to ensure people are aware of the true nature of the program and its limits.

## **6. An inappropriate policy and institutional environment**

Establishing a permanent CPP system requires a policy environment conducive to increasing civic engagement and partnership with local government. When the policy process continues to be protected from greater engagement by local policies that deny entry to residents, the CPP system may be powerless to enforce more inclusion. For instance, residents have consistently expressed a desire for a more participatory budgeting process to allocate city finances. However the current process limits budget discussions little more than a month leaving little space for resident involvement in setting budget priorities. These and other local laws and policies will have to be examined and reformed to create a democratic space conducive to greater citizen engagement.

We hope that this toolkit will shed light on what we are trying to accomplish and how our city can move forward. Adopting a formal CPP has many potential benefits for our city; enhancing participation in local democracy; improving the delivery and cost-effectiveness of local services; ensuring better targeted, more responsive and effective public spending; improved democratic relationships between citizens, political leaders and public servants; and increased investment in areas of social deprivation and need.

## Glossary of key terms

This glossary can help you make sense of some of the terms that are frequently used in government documents.

**Accountable** – When a representative is elected they are held responsible for the decisions they take. They have to provide answers to those they make decisions for. This is being accountable.

**Active citizenship** – Active citizenship is about individuals taking part in the decisions that shape their lives and the well-being of the communities they belong to.

**Capacity building** – Activities, resources and support that strengthen the skills and abilities of people and community groups to take effective action and play leading roles.

**Citizenship** – The act of contributing to public life and participating in solving public problems. Not a legal status.

**Civic Education** – The learning for effective participation in democratic and development processes at both local and national levels.

**Civic participation** – Relates to participation in state and government affairs. It includes participation in political processes and participation in governance.

**Civil society** – Non-profit and Non-governmental associations and informal networks in which individuals and groups engage in activities of public importance. It is different from the public activities of government because it is voluntary, and different from private sector activities because it seeks common ground and is not for profit. It is often described as the ‘third sector’.

**Community** – A community is a specific group of people who all hold something in common. Community often refers to either people who live in the same geographical place or people who are communities of interest.

**Communities of interest** are groups of people who share an identity – for example Ethnic or Faith communities or ‘Social’ communities of interest who share an experience – for example people with a particular disability or renters.

**Community cohesion** – Cohesion is not just about race equality and social inclusion. Community cohesion is a situation where:

- there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities
- the diversity of people’s different backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and positively valued
- those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities

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- strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighborhoods.

**Community development** – The process of providing help and advice to communities to bring about social change and justice by working with them to identify their needs, plan their next steps, take action and evaluate the results, all in ways that challenge oppression and tackle inequalities.

**Deliberation** – Careful consideration or discussion of reasons for and against a proposition; discussions where people talk among themselves and hear and consider different views on a topic.

**Deliberative decision-making** – Ways in which citizens can become involved in decision-making processes.

**E-democracy** – The improvement of traditional democratic processes between elected representatives and citizens over the internet.

**E-government** – The use of information technology to provide citizens with access to government information, services and business dealings over the internet.

**Empowerment** – Citizens and communities developing the confidence, skills and power that helps them to shape and influence decisions over policy and services in their local area either by themselves or with the support of government.

**Facilitation** – A (preferably independent) third party who helps participants explore their ideas and move towards desired goals.

**Ground rules** – Also known as ‘agreements’ or ‘guidelines’, ground rules are guidelines for discussion that participants agree to try to abide by during an event. Ground rules are meant to create a safe space for all participants.

**NIMBYism** – Not In My Backyard, is a defense mechanism many communities utilize when they lack opportunities to make more fundamental changes in the way society is organized. It leaves them in a position where their only possible option is to remove the identified issue or problem or block the ability of others to locate unwanted land uses or people in their community leaving them to be moved to another community.

**Public consultation** – A process involving two-way communication between a government and the public, through which both become informed about different perspectives on issues and proposals, providing the public with the opportunity to influence decisions to be made by the government.

**Social capital** – The norms and networks of social relations that build trust among community residents, social organizations and government. Can be bonding, bridging and linking, and is fundamental to the quality of life in communities.

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**Social exclusion** – A combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, unfair discrimination, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown, which can lead to people or places being excluded from the outcomes and opportunities enjoyed by mainstream society.

## **List of Partners and Supporters**

African-American Leadership Forum  
America Speaks  
Americorps Vista  
City Works  
Common Good  
Concordia  
Greater New Orleans Community Data Center  
Institute for Community Development  
Neighborhood Partnership Network  
New Orleans Afterschool Partnership  
New Orleans Council on Aging  
New Orleans Language Access Coalition  
New Orleans Urban League  
New Orleans Women of Color Health and Justice Initiative  
New Orleans Worker Resource Center  
Providence Community Housing  
Puentes  
Rally Foundation  
Restaurant Opportunities Center  
Total Community Action  
Tulane University Campus Community Partnerships

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