

Centering Language and Culture in Participatory Planning Processes:

A Case Study of the Cambridge

Community Development Department's

Community Engagement Team Model

A thesis submitted by

Sarah Jane B. Huber

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning

Tufts University

August 2023

Advisor: Laurie Goldman

Reader: Christine Cousineau

Abstract

Scholarship suggests that planning agencies have the potential to shape public participation processes that better serve marginalized populations. However, limited research on the role of culture and language in the design of these processes hinders progress. This case study documents the theory of change of one municipal planning agency's new model for public participation that focuses on communication and language justice. The model seeks to increase participation of people from historically excluded, underheard, and underserved communities in planning projects, programs, and processes. It aims to do so by hiring individuals from those communities to work directly for the agency as Outreach Workers. Findings suggest that trust, time, language, and culture are critical to improving relationships between the planning agency and members of marginalized communities. The results of this study also strengthen scholarship that says planning agencies benefit from working with community leaders to bridge the gap between institution and community.

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to express my appreciation to my committee for their support and guidance. My advisor Laurie Goldman was instrumental throughout this project, and she challenged me to think more deeply about my work. My reader Christine Cousineau provided thoughtful feedback and encouragement. I have learned a tremendous amount from both of them.

Second, I want to thank all of the people I had the opportunity to speak with who work for the City of Cambridge. I especially want to thank Marlees Owayda for her generosity, openness, and expertise. I want to thank the individuals I interviewed and all of the CET at CDD Outreach Workers for their warm welcome and wisdom. I would also like to thank Melissa Peters and Jennifer Lawrence for their insights. I learned lessons from all of these conversations that extend beyond my work and impact my worldview.

Lastly, I am incredibly grateful to my family and to friends new and old who have shown me kindness throughout this process. Special thanks to my husband Dan, my parents, parents-in-law, Katie Tolley, and Caitlin Connelly for cheering me on, for listening, for being my sounding board, and so much more.

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I. Introduction

Planning agencies have historically done a better job of including some groups of people than others in planning processes (Einstein et al., 2019). People who have been historically underheard, underserved, and excluded face challenges that make it difficult to participate in planning projects, programs, and processes. These challenges include overcoming distrust and communicating across linguistic and cultural differences (Allen & Slotterback, 2021; Harwood, 2022; Umemoto, 2001). While planning scholars and practitioners have identified the need for more inclusive participation practices, there is a lack of empirical research on the design of these practices. Research has paid more attention to the limits of participation models. Very few have studied how to address barriers to participation faced by immigrants and by language and cultural minorities (Einstein et al., 2019; Harwood, 2022). Additionally, whereas the concept of language justice is rising in popularity as a way to emphasize that everyone has the right to communicate in the language in which they are most comfortable (City of Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2022b; Highlander Research and Education Center, 2021), scholars have yet to explore the ways in which this concept is currently interacting with planning processes or could interact with them in the future.

The City of Cambridge has created an innovative model that is contending with these issues. The CDD's new model is called the Community Engagement Team (CET), or CET at CDD. The goal of this approach is to increase participation by people in marginalized communities. It has been in use for less than a year and it has yet to be documented so that others can learn about this promising model.

The CET at CDD is comprised of a Community Engagement Manager and up to seven individuals from underrepresented communities who work directly for the department as part-time, paid Outreach Workers. Outreach Workers seek to increase participation of individuals in planning processes and grow community trust. The model works in tandem with staff training in cultural competency and language justice. The Community Engagement Team model first started in human services but has recently been adopted by the planning department. My research will focus on CET at CDD while also pursuing critical information about the emergence of the CET model in human services. I will document the model and its theory of change. The model offers insights into the challenges and opportunities of centering culture and language in planning practices.

Research Questions

I have one primary question and three secondary questions:

What is the theory of change behind the CET at CDD model?

- a. How are the processes of the CET at CDD designed to address language justice and navigate cultural differences?
- b. What roles are Outreach Workers expected to play in building relationships between the Community Development Department and their communities?
- c. What are the key stakeholders' first impressions of the CET at CDD model and its application for city planning?

In the remainder of this section, I give a brief overview of the model that draws on the only available report, *Shining A Light on the Racism Faced by American-born Black Families in Cambridge*. *Shining a Light* was written by a working group of the Community Engagement

Team (CET) at the Department of Human Services Programs (DHSP). My overview was also informed by interviews with the CDD Community Engagement Manager (CEM) who leads the CET at CDD, a former member of the CDD planning staff, and a director-level CDD staff member.

The Community Engagement Team Model

The City of Cambridge has two CETs. The first CET was created by the city's Department of Human Service Programs (DHSP) in 2005. It grew from city staff's interest in reducing barriers to public participation such as language access, cultural differences, and distrust in government, and doing better outreach. In 2007, the DHSP CET discovered that the biggest barriers to participation in city programs for immigrant families were language and cultural differences and the biggest barrier for American-born Black families was racism (The Community Engagement Team, 2016). The second CET was formed by the CDD in summer 2022.

My research focuses on the second CET—CET at CDD—while also pursuing critical information about the emergence of the CET model in DHSP. With the CET model originating in human services, CET at CDD is a unique interdisciplinary approach and offers insights into the role that Outreach Workers can play in connecting a municipal planning agency with marginalized and underrepresented communities.

Like the DHSP CET, the CET at CDD seeks to bridge cultural and language divides between the City and the community that each Outreach Worker represents (J. Lawrence, personal communication, January 19, 2023). As in the DHSP model, the CET at CDD is designed to have at least one Outreach Worker for each of the specific underrepresented communities as determined by the recent census. These communities currently include the following:

American Born Black, Amharic Speaking, Spanish Speaking, Bangla Speaking, Arabic Speaking, and Chinese Speaking (City of Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2022a).

The communities that Outreach Workers represent have been historically underserved or excluded by government services, programs, and processes. Individuals in these communities may have varying citizenship status, different levels of comfort with the English language and cultural norms, and a distrust of government. Each CET at CDD Outreach Worker is considered to be an expert on their own community. The CET model is designed to leverage that expertise for the CDD to design better processes for participation and to build trust between the CDD and the community they represent.

CET Outreach Workers are not translators or interpreters. Rather they are supposed to help other city staff and members of the community communicate with each other. The CET at CDD Outreach Workers have two primary roles: do outreach for the CDD and provide feedback to the CDD. Outreach Workers share information from the CDD with their communities such as job postings, advisory board vacancies, meeting notices, or policy changes. They give input on community engagement processes to other CDD staff from all five divisions: Community Planning, Housing, Economic Opportunity and Development, Environmental and Transportation Planning, and Zoning and Development (City of Cambridge, Massachusetts, n.d.). They also work with those divisions to design engagement activities such as surveys and focus groups that Outreach Workers and other CDD staff conduct together.

In concert with the creation of the CET at CDD, the department began offering information on language justice and plain language. Language justice is the right to understand and be understood in the language in which a person feels most comfortable (Highlander

Research and Education Center, 2021; Tauber et al., 2020). Plain language is clear communication that your audience can understand (City of Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2022c; The Plain Language Action and Information Network & U.S. General Services Administration, n.d.). Plain language benefits people from different cultural backgrounds, who speak and read other languages, who have various levels of literacy, and who have disabilities (City of Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2022c). CDD staff and consultants are encouraged to participate in ongoing workshops about language. The adoption of better language justice practices, such as plain language, is supposed to make the job of the CET outreach workers easier.

Theory of Change

Because the CET at CDD began only in the Summer of 2022, it is too soon to evaluate it. Instead, I will document the process so far and use my observations to describe its theory of change. In other words, I will explore the assumptions, goals, and actions planned to reach those goals. According to scholars Gienapp and Hostetter (2022), a theory of change can help identify intermediate goals required to reach the larger goal. As explained by Anderson (2009), theories of change are dependent on the quality of information available and are living documents.

Importance of the Model

I expect that this information will be valuable to Cambridge because the initiative is a new model for engagement and has not been documented in this way before. It could also serve as a starting point for CDD leadership when they eventually do decide to conduct an evaluation. Additionally, there is interest from other city departments to create their own CET

to build capacity for engagement in their own programs and services (J. Lawrence, personal communication, January 19, 2023). Putting the theory of change into words may help inform future iterations of the model in and beyond Cambridge.

By documenting the theory of change, I also contribute to the literature on city planning and community outreach, with a focus on language and cultural differences. Documenting the CET at CDD model will help address the aforementioned gap in the literature and contribute to knowledge about how to design planning practices that support cultural and linguistic differences. I also hope that my research will inspire and inform communities beyond Cambridge who are looking to redesign their own processes for public participation in city planning. I will explore this further in my literature review.

II. Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to situate my investigation of the City of Cambridge Community Development Department's (CDD) Community Engagement Team (CET) model of public participation in the established understanding of what effective and meaningful community engagement entails. It is also intended to identify the gaps in the literature that my investigation of this new model can help illuminate.

To identify relevant scholarship, I used the Web of Science database. I used these key words: outreach, barriers, language, language justice, culture, trust, and immigrant. I combined each key word with terms that urban planning uses to refer to the act of soliciting public input and engaging members of the public in decision-making: public engagement, community engagement, public participation, community participation, collaborative planning, or participatory planning. I also limited my search to the fields, or what Web of Science calls "research areas" of urban planning, community development, and public administration. I used citation tracing to find additional articles. I also searched planning journals prominent in the United States for relevant literature. Additionally, I have sought out empirical research when possible, but research on participation is often focused on instructional or theoretical perspectives (Bryson et al., 2013).

First, I provide a broad overview of the field of planning's understanding of what engagement means and the nuances in definitions of engagement. Second, I outline the legal and professional obligations that have been developed as a result. Third, I introduce several frameworks for thinking about and designing participatory processes. Fourth, I identify

challenges to designing and implementing meaningful engagement. Finally, I discuss efforts to address those challenges.

Understandings of Community Engagement

There is a general consensus that community engagement or public participation in planning processes is important to the field of planning and its mission to serve the public interest (American Planning Association, 2021). However, there are many approaches to participation in planning and research suggests that the differences in approach do matter (Fung, 2015). Empirical research has shown that well-designed engagement or participation can increase government accountability, public trust, and even justice (Bell & Reed, 2021; Burby, 2003; Fung, 2015; Wang & Wan Wart, 2007). Studies demonstrate that poorly designed engagement can attract unrepresentative feedback and contribute to existing systemic inequities (Einstein et al., 2019; Planning for Equity Policy Guide, 2019). Despite recognizing that community engagement is important, researchers are not in agreement about which processes lead to which outcomes (Bryson et al., 2013). Within this discussion, scholars debate the purpose of participation, conceptions of community, and the desired level of community involvement in decision-making.

Differences may stem from various epistemological understandings of engagement. Quick and Feldman (2011) argue that participation and inclusion are independent aspects of engagement. According to Fung (2015) and Quick and Feldman (2011), public participation is the ability of members of the public to offer feedback and is generally short-term and small-scale. Inclusion is a pattern of practices, not just specific practices, that are ongoing without a definite end (Quick & Feldman, 2011). Quick and Feldman (2011) argue that both are required

for effective engagement. Quick and Feldman (2011) found that participants were more satisfied with planning processes that had high levels of inclusion than those with high participation. High levels of inclusion are more important than high rates of participation, but both are needed (Quick & Feldman, 2011).

Other differences in approach may come from varied understandings of community. Community can include a geographic identity, but geography is not inherent to the concept. A community is a group of people who have a shared identity, experience, knowledge, or practice (Quick & Feldman, 2011). Quick and Feldman (2011) explain that a “community of practice” is when people practice together and grow their practices, and it can result in more agile groups better prepared to address new problems (Quick & Feldman, 2011). It can be a group of people who together create their own ways of learning and understanding (Quick & Feldman, 2011). Through this lens, community is not static and can be built through repetition and relationships.

There are also many views on the community’s role and what level of involvement in decision-making and in designing the engagement process itself is ideal. According to Rosen and Painter (2019), the step beyond inclusion is co-production. Co-production is capacity building and resource sharing (Rosen & Painter, 2019). Rosen and Painter (2019) explain that co-production strives for shared power but acknowledges that power is unequal and changing. In this school of thought, power exists and planners must recognize it and navigate it.

The Obligation to Pursue Community Engagement

Discrepancies in definitions of engagement leave room for interpretation. Consequently, there is a wide range of requirements for involving the public in planning. Different aspects of planning have different laws and policies. For example, the U.S. Department of Housing and

Urban Development (HUD) has extensive requirements for state and local government (Citizen Participation Plan; Local Governments, 2020). These include adopting a “citizen participation plan” and “encouraging citizen participation” in several specific ways, such as by working with public housing agencies (Citizen Participation Plan; Local Governments, 2020). The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has the Open Meeting Law which is designed to provide government transparency. This law dictates how public bodies communicate with the public, including requiring them to open meetings to the public and post meeting notices at least 48 hours in advance (Office of Attorney General Maura Healey, 2018). For the Commonwealth, a public body includes boards, commissions, and committees. As the Office of the Attorney General stated in their Open Meeting Law Guide (2018), “The democratic process depends on the public having knowledge about the considerations underlying governmental action.”

Professional norms and a code of ethics also inform how planners approach engagement. The American Planning Association (APA) has a *Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct* to which all professional planners must adhere. The APA does not identify specific requirements for participation, but it names “serving the public interest” as the most important responsibility that planners undertake (American Planning Association, 2021). To guide planners, the American Planning Association *Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct* states:

Be conscious of the rights of others. Develop skills that enable better communication and more effective, respectful, and compassionate planning efforts with all communities, especially underrepresented communities and marginalized people, so that they may fully participate in planning. Respect the experience, knowledge, and history of all people (American Planning Association, 2021, pp. 1–2).

It also instructs planners to:

Seek social justice by identifying and working to expand choice and opportunity for all, emphasizing our special responsibility to plan with those who have been marginalized or disadvantaged (American Planning Association, 2021, p. 3).

It defines “historically marginalized/underrepresented communities” as “groups denied full participation in the mainstream cultural, political, and economic activities” (American Planning Association, 2021, p. 18). Of relevance to my research, the American Planning Association acknowledges that this includes cultural and ethnic minorities, people of color, people with disabilities, people with limited English ability, and people with uncertain immigration status (American Planning Association, 2021, p. 19). While the *APA Code of Ethics* calls on planners to “plan with” underrepresented communities, it does not clarify how to implement that.

Frameworks for Meaningful Community Engagement

Prominent frameworks for community engagement tend to focus on the intensity of public participation in the abstract rather than empirical research about processes in practice. These frameworks include the Ladder of Citizen Participation, the Spectrum of Public Participation, and the Democracy Cube. All three models frame engagement differently and focus on different variables. While each model comes with its own critiques, all can be used to assess the quality of engagement. However, they have varying degrees of success addressing communication and relationship building with culturally diverse community members.

Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969) is a continuum of public power from "manipulation" to "citizen control" (Figure 1). It provides a strong visual metaphor and is a usable framework for measuring power sharing. However, the Ladder has been critiqued for confusing strategies and outcome (Bratt & Reardon, 2013; Quick & Feldman, 2011). It also assumes top-down planning and does not help to fundamentally change power structures (Rosen & Painter, 2019). The Ladder does not acknowledge the role of communication in public participation processes.

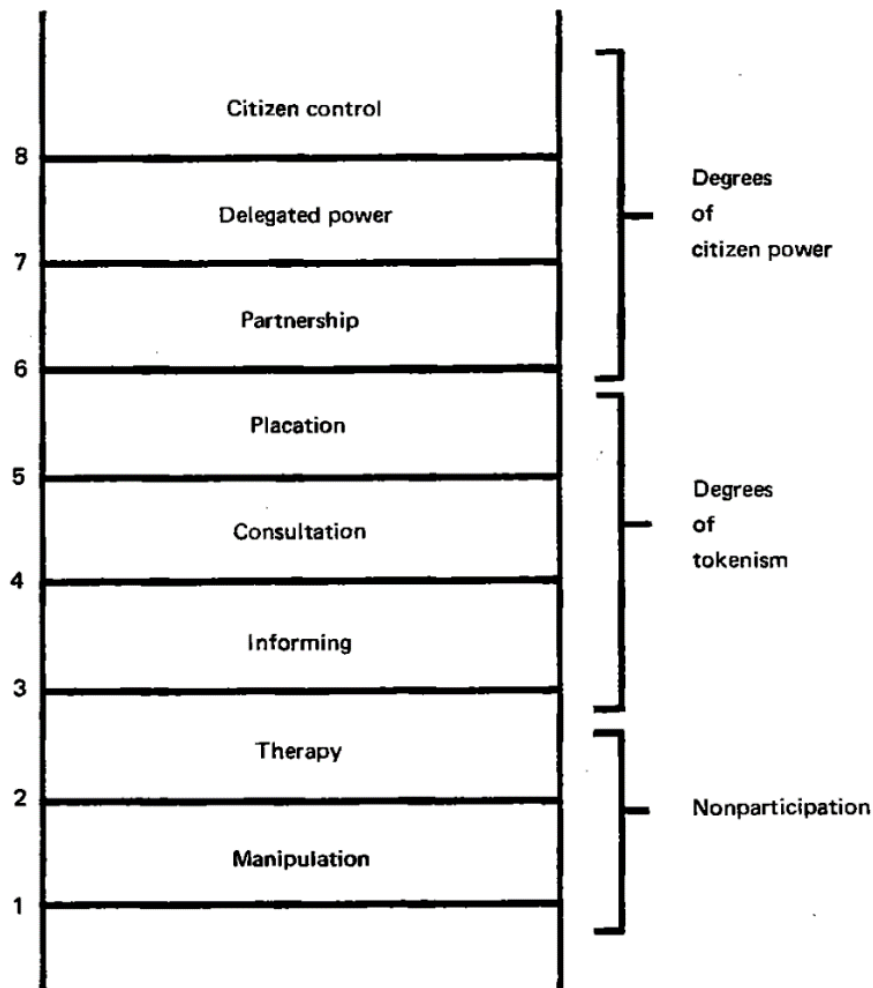


Figure 1. A Ladder of Citizen Participation. Arnstein, 1969, p. 217.

Like the Ladder, the International Association for Public Participation’s Spectrum of Public Participation (Figure 2) shows impact of the public on decision-making processes (International Association for Public Participation, 2018). This is a resource that the *Planning for Equity Policy Guide* (2019) encourages planners to use when designing engagement activities. It begins to capture relationships between organization and public by focusing on decision-making and goals, but it does not explicitly identify relationships. It does explain how the organization will communicate with the public by framing that communication as “promises.”

		INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION				
		INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.	
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.	

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Figure 2. IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation. International Association for Public Participation, 2018.

Fung’s Democracy Cube (Fung, 2006, 2015) includes communication as one of the axes in his framework for evaluating democracy (Figure 3). Fung (2015) places instances of participation in democratic activities in a three-dimensional diagram of which the axes are: authority and power, participants, and communication and decision mode. Fung explains that the model asks three key questions: “(1) Who participates? (2) How do they communicate and

make decisions? (3) What influence do they have over the resulting public decisions and actions?”(Fung, 2015, p. 514). The Democracy Cube is designed to map how instances of participation do or do not address challenges of governance. His model is not just for the planning context, but for any context that includes governance.

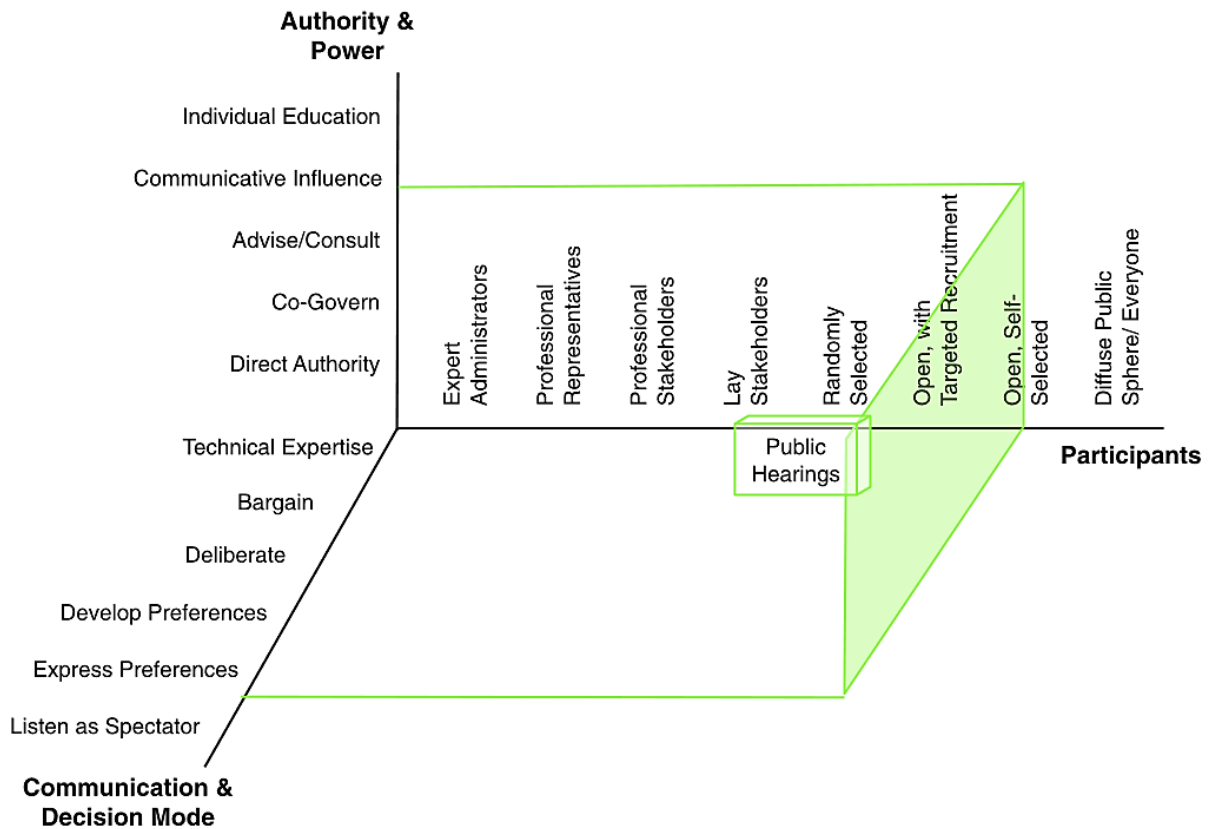


Figure 3. Democracy Cube. Fung, 2015, p. 515.

Challenges to Meaningful Engagement

Numerous challenges to meaningful engagement in planning processes include who participates and how information is communicated, captured, and implemented. Planning processes are not necessarily representative of the population, despite stated commitments to inclusion. Einstein et al. (2019) found that public planning meetings attracted participants who

are typically older, male, longtime residents, voters in local elections, and homeowners. Allen and Slotterback (2021) found that immigrants participate in government-led planning processes at a disproportionately low rate. Immigrants' lack of participation in government-led planning processes is likely caused by a confluence of factors that have been explored through empirical research including governments' precarious relationships with immigrant communities, unrepresentative designers and decision-makers, and difficulty with data collection (Allen & Slotterback, 2021; American Planning Association, 2019; Harwood, 2022). However, there has been little written about the relationship between language and participation of marginalized groups in public planning processes.

Relationships with Immigrant Communities

According to several studies, planners have not prioritized relationships with immigrant communities (Harwood, 2022; Umemoto, 2001; Vitiello, 2009). Lee (2019) interviewed immigrants who were not citizens and found that they did not participate in planning processes because they were afraid that interactions with government agencies might lead to deportation or affect their citizenship status. Vitiello (2009) studied planning literature and professional planning conference discussions about migrants and immigrants over the last century. He found that people working in social work and economic development had a more purposeful and stronger relationship with migrant and immigrant communities than planners (Vitiello, 2009). More than a decade later, Harwood (2022) found that planners are not involved with initiatives focused on welcoming immigrants and they do not work with immigrant affairs staff. Harwood (2022) also found that planners said they were committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion, but were not knowledgeable about immigrant communities.

Representation in the Planning Profession

Scholarship shows that who designs the participation matters, not just who participates (Clark, 2021). According to many scholars, planners are not value-neutral; they bring their own biases and set of ethics to their work (Brooks, 2019; Clark, 2021). This can directly and indirectly impact public participation. For example, according to Clark (2021), designers' values about tensions in planning, such as the importance of local knowledge versus specialized knowledge, impact how the public participates. Meléndez and Hoff (2022) conducted semi-structured interviews with first- and second-generation immigrants in Oregon on collaborative governing bodies, including committees, boards, and planning commissions, and found that the culture of a planning organization impacts how participants perceive their influence. They found that both formal training and informal activities were important to shaping this perception.

Planners who conduct engagement processes often do not reflect the populations they are attempting to engage with. According to the American Planning Association's *Planning for Equity Policy Guide* (2019), the demographics of planners are less diverse than those of the general population. Other research has found that planners who come from historically underrepresented populations face additional barriers in the workplace (García et al., 2021). García et al. (2021) found that African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x planners face racism in the workplace at higher rates than their counterparts who do not identify as African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x. Despite their importance to the profession, most planning schools do not offer courses on immigration or cultural competency skills (Agyeman & Erickson, 2012; Vitiello, 2009).

Collecting Data

Even if the groups engaged are representative of the general population and planners can manage cultural and linguistic differences, data on engagement can be hard to capture. Moore and Elliot (2016) observed the difficulty of capturing detailed and contextual data—what they refer to as tacit knowledge—on a large scale. Umemoto (2001) observed that both verbal and nonverbal communication language, such as “narrative, tone, or silence” have meaning. Capturing these aspects of language and of tacit knowledge such as stories and perspectives requires better technical communication skills, with a focus on listening (Moore & Elliott, 2016).

Efforts to Address the Challenges of Meaningful Engagement

In response to increased awareness around inequality, planning agencies have crafted creative ways to involve the public in decision-making processes beyond what is legally required (American Planning Association, 2019). While many scholars identify the need for improvement, only a handful have specifically studied how to address barriers faced by immigrants and by language minorities (Einstein et al., 2019; Harwood, 2022).

Research suggests that building relationships between planners and community members through outreach, possibly with support of nonprofits or a cultural translator, can play a vital role in gaining trust and engaging underrepresented communities, including immigrants and language minorities (Allen & Slotterback, 2021; Clark, 2021; Lee, 2019; Umemoto, 2001). The *APA Planning for Equity Policy Guide* (2019) emphasizes the importance of building trust through outreach and targeted community-specific strategies to increase equity. Lee (2019) recommended that planners regularly engage in outreach activities in order to build trust. According to Clark (2021), working across organizations and among varied

perspectives can lead to more effective design of participation processes. Clark (2020) suggests that participation processes would improve if designers with different perspectives intentionally worked together to create them. Clark (2020) extrapolates that the definition of a “designer” can extend beyond traditional definitions to include people impacted by planning and policy decisions. Harwood (2022) and Allen and Slotterback (2021) call on planners to build long-term relationships with leaders in immigrant communities to shape policies and plans that are culturally appropriate. Allen and Slotterback (2021) identify the need for relational practices rather than transactional and recommend that planning agencies leverage relationships with community organizations led by people in the community in question. Umemoto (2001) uses the term “cultural translators” to describe community leaders and organizers who work between a planning organization and the community. According to Umemoto, cultural translators can help planners design processes that will be effective and can help planners gain access to the community in question. Umemoto’s research was about a visioning process between a university and a native Hawaiian community, and residents organically performed the role of cultural translator. However, I was not able to find planning research on local government employing a member of the community to do outreach work on behalf of a municipality, like the CET at CDD model in Cambridge.

Scholars suggest that purposeful communication strategies are key to successful community engagement. The American Planning Association’s (2019) *Planning for Equity Policy Guide* proposes that trust is built through active listening, making realistic promises, and delivering on those promises. Meléndez and Hoff (2022) brought to light the need for inclusive organizational cultures that lift up immigrant voices, allow flexibility, and support informality

(Meléndez & Hoff, 2022). Sandercock (2000) proposed that a planning process with dialogue and mediation between planning staff and those affected, what is called a “therapeutic” approach, might be more effective than consensus building. Sandercock (2000) observes that when dealing with difference, rational discourse may not always be possible and consensus may not actually lead to satisfactory outcomes. Moore and Elliot (2016) hypothesize that capturing tacit knowledge requires better technical communication skills, with a focus on listening. While researchers provide several suggestions, there is a lack of empirical research about what actually works.

The Role of Language in Public Participation

One of the few studies available about planning in the United States and the role of language in participation is Umemoto’s (2001) study of a visioning project in a Native Hawaiian community. The project team faced challenges communicating across languages and cultures. For example, in the Hawaiian Homestead community of Papakōlea people in the elder generation understood the term “visioning” as a personal and private practice of communication with deified ancestors (Umemoto, 2001). In contrast, the planners had intended “visioning” to mean an exercise where people talk with each other about their hopes for their community (Umemoto, 2001). In this example, culture and language are intertwined. Umemoto (2001) calls this a “manifestation of cultural difference in the use of language.” The visioning exercise started with an avoidable misunderstanding because a word had different meaning for different members of the community.

Plain language and language justice have emerged as frameworks for communication in other fields (Mazur, 2000). There is considerable gray literature on both plain language and

language justice, but there is a lack of empirical research related to city planning. Plain language is an approach to writing that prioritizes the reader's understanding (Mazur, 2000). Writing in plain language means that the writer only uses words and sentence structures that the reader is familiar with (Mazur, 2000). The term appears in public administration, but scarcely in city planning. Several countries have developed plain language policies, including the United States and Norway (Johannessen et al., 2017; The Plain Language Action and Information Network & U.S. General Services Administration, n.d.). In the United States, the Federal legislature passed a Plain Writing Act in 2010 requiring Federal agencies to communicate in a way that the public understands (Plain Writing Act of 2010, 2010). The Act states that its purpose is to increase "effectiveness and accountability" to the public (Plain Writing Act of 2010, 2010). Few relevant empirical studies exist, but one notable exception is Biglieri (2021), who studied the participation in planning processes of people living with dementia and found that engagement was improved by using plain language as well as other "patient communication" techniques.

The concept of "language justice" is gaining popularity as a way to frame language accessibility as an essential right. According to the language justice collaborative Antena Aire (2020), language justice is the right to communicate, to understand, and to be understood in one's language or languages of choice (Antena Aire, 2020). The framework originated at the Highlander Research and Education Center and continues to be developed by Highlander, Antena Aire, and other grassroots organizing groups (Antena Aire, 2020; Highlander Research and Education Center, 2021). Much of my understanding of language justice comes from three workshops that I attended in fall 2022. The first two were part of a series by the Unbound Language Justice Cooperative for Tufts University Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning

(UEP). The third was a Plain Language Workshop for City of Cambridge employees and consultants. The City of Cambridge Plain Language workshop trainer explained that “language access” became language justice (City of Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2022c). The trainer said, “If people can't understand what we're saying they can't weigh in” (City of Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2022c).

The Unbound Language Justice Cooperative presented a more transformative interpretation of language justice that they borrowed from the Cenzontle Language Justice Cooperative, Asheville, NC:

Language Justice is a commitment to create inclusive multilingual spaces where each of us may feel free to bring our whole selves into the room. This is the practice of actively building a world where English is not the dominant language in our spaces and where language is not a barrier to communication and community building” (*Cenzontle*, n.d.; Unbound Language Justice Cooperative, 2022).

The same workshop identified the 1964 Title VI of the Civil Rights Act as a justification for language justice in the United States:

No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance (Unbound Language Justice Cooperative, 2022; Title VI, Civil Rights Act of 1964, n.d.).

The field of planning has not yet explored how language justice might fit into existing practices. According to my search, only one planning study used the term “language justice,” and it did so because it identifies language justice as one of the gaps in the field that need to be addressed (Brinkley & Wagner, 2022).

Conclusion

Underrepresented populations continue to face numerous barriers to participation such as lack of trust of government, challenges communicating with planners, and difficulty navigating cultural differences in planning processes . Many scholars have developed models for understanding and evaluating processes, but few are empirical and attention has largely been paid to the limits of certain models rather than what is successful. Scholarship suggests that planning agencies have potential to shape practices that better serve and strengthen relationships with underrepresented communities. A community of practice approach highlights that individual and collective practices create community, and those practices can exclude as well as include (Quick & Feldman, 2011). However, limited research on culture and language hinders progress and significant attention to these subjects is needed, especially for communities with growing numbers of immigrants. This case study documents a new model for public participation that seeks to focus on cultural and linguistic differences and the other relational issues discussed above.

III. Methodology

I document the theory of change of the City of Cambridge Community Development Department's Community Engagement Team, also known as CET at CDD. I focus on relationships, actions, and ways of thinking of the individuals involved with the CET at CDD model. I use qualitative methods of data collection because I aim to capture processes and context (Gaber & Gaber, 2007). Through analysis of the collected data, I seek to also contribute to the literature about processes for planning that aim to address barriers to participation for underserved and underrepresented communities. This theory of change is articulated through analysis of four concurrent data collection methods: meeting observation, interviews, existing survey data, and document review.

Data Collection

Meeting Observation

First, I observed one of the weekly CET at CDD staff meetings, where I saw the Outreach Workers and the Community Engagement Manager (CEM) discuss their ongoing work. While there are seven Outreach Worker positions, there are currently five active Outreach Workers because one seat is not filled and one individual is on parental leave. There were four Outreach Workers present at the meeting I attended. The Community Engagement Manager set the agenda and led the meeting. At the beginning of the meeting, I introduced myself, explained my purpose for being there, discussed consent, and then collected signed consent forms. For the rest of the meeting, I sat quietly and observed.

With some regularity, other CDD staff join the weekly meeting and present a new project or updates to an ongoing project and get Outreach Worker feedback. This version of the weekly meeting is referred to as a “feedback meeting.” According to the CEM, some feedback meetings are scheduled months in advance, but most of the projects are less predictable. The meeting I attended was originally scheduled to be a feedback meeting, but the feedback portion was postponed and the meeting was focused on other agenda items. The CEM made the decision to postpone feedback a few minutes into the meeting because two Outreach Workers were running late and another was absent due to illness. The CEM later explained to the team that they postponed it because they wanted as many Outreach Workers as possible to be part of the process of giving feedback.

Despite not seeing the feedback process specifically, I was able to see how the Outreach Workers and the CEM interacted with one another, what they talked about and how they talked about it, and what actions they have planned and how they intend to execute those actions. Specifically, I learned more about their internal processes and their outreach process. In my interviews, outlined in the next section, I took into account the fact that I was unable to see the process of giving feedback first-hand and tailored my interview questions so that I was able to get necessary information about this part of the model in another way.

In addition to the CET at CDD weekly team meeting, I attempted to attend a public planning meeting with the intention of observing how members of CET at CDD in attendance interacted with the public in and with other CDD staff, consultants, or developers who are leading the meeting. Event attendance is part of the Outreach Worker role. Every Outreach Worker is expected to attend multiple CDD-related meetings and events per week and

complete an Event Report Survey afterwards. Because data from the Event Report Survey was part of my analysis process, I thought attending a meeting that they also planned to attend could complement my analysis.

The meeting I chose to attend was virtual and organized by a developer who was proposing new construction in a busy commercial area in Cambridge. It was a pre-application community meeting, required by the city before the developer can apply for a Planning Board Special Permit. It was advertised on the CDD Zoning and Development website. I followed the Zoom meeting link on the digital event flyer, but Zoom required a passcode to enter. No passcode was listed online so I emailed the developer's address provided on the flyer. About ten minutes later, I received a response with a passcode. The passcode worked and I found myself on Zoom with just four people—all part of the developer's team. They asked if I knew how to use Zoom and if I could help them figure out how to remove the passcode. I tried to talk them through it but was unsuccessful. They adjourned the meeting. While my experience did not provide the information I set out to gather, it did highlight challenges of virtual or hybrid public meetings, challenges I saw reflected in the Event Report Survey responses.

Interviews

I conducted a series of 45–60-minute semi-structured interviews with six people online using the Zoom platform. From CET at CDD, I interviewed two Outreach Workers and the Community Engagement Manager (CEM) who leads the team. I interviewed another CDD staff member who has collaborated with CET at CDD on feedback and outreach projects. I also interviewed one of two Co-Leaders of the Community Engagement Team at the Department of Human Service Programs (CET at DHSP) because that team was the inspiration for CET at CDD.

I interviewed two Outreach Workers to learn more about their role and their understanding of the purpose of the model. After I attended the weekly CET at CDD meeting, the Community Engagement Manager (CEM) asked all six CET at CDD Outreach Workers if they wanted to be interviewed. Two people expressed interest and agreed to be interviewed. I asked both Outreach Workers the same questions and sent the questions ahead of time.

During each Outreach Worker interview, I tried to learn more about their connection to their community and what outreach looks like for their community. I asked about their experience working with other CDD staff on feedback projects. I also asked what they think it looks like for their community to feel “welcome.” The Event Report Survey, discussed in the following section, asks about “welcomeness,” so I included this question to complement that analysis. I also asked about their understanding of the purpose CET at CDD serves for the community and for CDD, and their perception of how the work has been received so far. I asked a similar question to each person I interviewed so that I could include multiple perspectives in analysis. Throughout the interviews, I listened for how Outreach Workers talked about language and cultural differences in the planning process, their relationships with the public and other CDD staff, and how they understand their own intended impact on community development decisions.

I interviewed the CDD Community Engagement Manager (CEM) who leads CET at CDD to understand more about how the model functions and how other CDD processes support the model. From preliminary conversations with a former CDD staff member who helped form CET at CDD, I understood that the CEM plays an instrumental role in CET at CDD both day-to-day

and in the larger vision. The CEM is responsible for CDD's other community engagement initiatives as well, including the Community Engagement Handbook (see Document Review).

I interviewed two CDD staff members who is not part of CET at CDD but has collaborated with CET at CDD on outreach and feedback projects. CDD staff who are not part of the CET at CDD but who work with CET at CDD on specific outreach or feedback projects are typically referred to as "project managers." The purpose of these interviews was to better understand how the CET at CDD's outreach and feedback impacts other CDD projects, programs, and processes. The purpose was also to identify any differences between working with the CET at CDD versus working with the original CET, located in the Department of Human Services (CET at DHSP). I paid particular attention to how the project managers talked about their relationships with Outreach Workers and the community, and I tried to get specifics about how they each think CET at CDD impacts their work as in community development. The project managers offered insights into the experience of working with the CET at CDD, but may not represent all project managers' experiences.

Additionally, I interviewed one of two Co-Leaders of CET at DHSP. I chose to interview someone who works with the original CET so that I could learn about the model that inspired CET at CDD. I also wanted to compare and contrast the two CETs to identify ways that the CDD has adapted the model specifically for planning.

Existing Event Report Survey Data

I analyzed 47 unique responses to the Event Report Survey previously collected over the course of four months by the Community Engagement Manager (CEM). Every Outreach Worker is expected to attend multiple CDD-related events per week and complete an Event Report

Survey after each event. These meetings vary and include Cambridge commission and board meetings, community meetings led by developers, and community engagement meetings led by other CDD staff. The CEM has been collecting this data for several months but has never formally analyzed it, so they offered access to it. Through these surveys, I learned more about the role of event attendance and feedback to the CET at CDD model.

Document Review

I reviewed the *Equitable and Inclusive Community Engagement Handbook for Cambridge, Mass.* published in 2022 that includes guidance for CDD staff about how to work with CET at CDD. I specifically looked for the way that the people who wrote the document describe the CET's purpose and how they identify the rationale and the impetus for the model. Together with the Community Engagement Manager (CEM) interview, the *Community Engagement Handbook* helped map out relationships between CET at CDD and other CDD initiatives—a necessary exercise to develop CET at CDD's theory of change. The CDD was in the process of creating an accompanying training to go with the *Handbook*. The CEM explained that staff will be expected to complete the training before using the *Handbook* so that they use the information as intended.

Data Analysis

The goal of my analysis was to further develop the theory of change of the CET at CDD model through the experiences of those involved. I analyzed the data collected by describing what I observed and then grouped observations into key areas informed by preliminary research and a review of the literature. I developed two codebooks to begin analysis. The first

codebook focuses on the research participant perspectives. This was applied to open-ended questions in the Event Report Survey, interviews, and meeting observation. The second codebook was applied to the Event Report Survey's categorical data. The categories were provided in the Event Report Survey as multiple-choice questions. Then, I sorted the coded participant perspective data into five groups: outreach, feedback-related processes, feedback received so far, impact of the feedback so far, and future goals. After that, I identified themes in each of those groups and determined how they were connected. I included the categorical data from the second codebook where relevant. Lastly, I revisited the groups and renamed them to indicate the findings from the themes. As a result, I built a framework for how the themes are connected. In other words, I used those groups and themes to develop a theory of change.

To keep the identities of participants confidential, I chose to use gender-neutral pronouns "they" and "them," regardless of the participant's gender identity. I also kept the names of specific projects and events confidential, except when given explicit permission to include the name. The CET at CDD is still working on their processes for delivering feedback. Some of the information I accessed, such as the Event Report Surveys, has not yet been shared with the subjects of the feedback. It was important to the Community Engagement Manager to deliver the feedback intentionally and constructively.

IV. Findings

In this chapter, I explore the aspects of CET at CDD's outreach that are understood to contribute to trust between the CDD and the community. I examine the processes that make feedback from Outreach Workers to project managers possible. Then, I delve into specific feedback I collected and accessed. I then share perceptions of how the first year of CET at CDD has impacted planning practices. Lastly, I consider the key stakeholders' hopes for the future.

1. Building Trust Through Outreach

Trust between CDD and the community is central to the CET at CDD theory of change. The Community Engagement Manager (CEM) shared the saying: "Relationships move at the speed of trust." I found that the way CET at CDD builds trust with community members has three main components, and Outreach Workers are central to each one. First, Outreach Workers are members of the community they represent, and because of their identities, they may be seen as people community members can have confidence in. Second, Outreach Workers plan to engage with community members regularly, over a long period of time. Third, Outreach Workers seek to help community members get their needs met and find resources, even if those resources are not related to CDD's primary functions. These layers build on one another and are part of what makes CET at CDD unique.

1.1. A Trusted Community Member

CET at CDD Outreach Workers are members of the communities they serve—communities that have historically found city resources to be inaccessible. The Community

Engagement Manager (CEM) recalled taking the position because they observed that the city's growth was not affecting everyone in the same way. In an interview they said, "I heard from people in my community that Cambridge was changing, and it was leaving them behind."

Outreach Workers are working within the city to increase trust between the city and their communities. During an interview, one Outreach Worker said, "I think that those communities that really struggle within Cambridge don't really know the opportunities that are available at their fingertips." The Outreach Worker said that they want community members to see them as a resource. The Outreach Worker wants community members to feel comfortable going to CDD or approach the Outreach Worker when the community members need support with related projects and programs such as housing or concern about construction in their neighborhood. The CEM explained that CET at CDD is not "build it and they will come" or "hold a public meeting and people will show up." Instead, the CEM said that the CET at CDD does the opposite:

"We turn that on its head . . . We will go to where the people are . . . both physically, but it's also using plain language . . . speaking the language that people actually speak and going to community spaces and talking about what's important to the people who are there."

Outreach Workers' identities typically put them in a different position than their colleagues in CDD. They have different demographic characteristics than most CDD staff. The CEM shared that Outreach Workers' "socioeconomic and racial and linguistic makeup is different from the rest of the department." The project manager I spoke with also made this observation about the differences between most CDD staff and the Outreach Workers. The CEM explained to me that a community member may feel more comfortable talking with an

Outreach Worker than with other staff members, “it shifts how that conversation happens . . . it’s from a different place when it’s an outreach worker than it is from a planner.”

One Outreach Worker said that they are working to change the reputation of the city government from being exclusive to inclusive, “Sometimes you got to use your own kind of capital—human capital—as a trusted person, as an honest person, as a kind and resourceful person . . . to correct that image, or to adjust that reputation.” Each Outreach Worker’s position as a member of their community, who speaks the language and shares the culture, adds to their credibility with communities that have a history of feeling unwelcome by the city.

1.2. Long-term Relationships

Another element of the CET at CDD model is that it seeks to develop regular, ongoing processes for participation instead of one-time or inconsistent processes for participation. One Outreach Worker explained that it takes time for members of their community to trust someone who says that they are trying to help. The Outreach Worker said, “It takes us a long time for us to warm up, and think, you’re actually here to help us, not get something from us.”

One Outreach Worker shared that they have been very involved with their community for many years prior to their role with the CET at CDD and their community already sees them as a resource. They shared that they gather with their community at a set time every week and they talk one-on-one with people about their questions and concerns. They said if they do not know the answer, they find out and provide information the following week. They also post and distribute flyers in person and digitally in large online groups.

A different Outreach Worker explained to me that their community was spread around the city and does not gather as frequently in the same place, such as a place of worship, as

some other communities do. They said, “While we do have community, we’re very spread out.” Not all communities have the opportunity to meet with community members in venues where residents typically gather, independent of the CET, and Outreach Workers have to figure out what style and frequency of communication makes sense for them. They explained that outreach for their community requires going to the park, to the spaces where people hang out, and to community events.

Engaging with people regularly, over a long time, requires a familiarity with people’s interests and needs. Outreach Workers also do not want to exhaust people by asking them to participate in everything. During the weekly CET at CDD team meeting that I observed, one Outreach Worker shared that it can be difficult to figure out which community members would be interested in what events and programs. They explained that they did not want to tire people out. The team discussed this dilemma about who to share what information with, and other Outreach Workers added that this is a challenge for them as well. One Outreach Worker gave a suggestion to take notes about which person is interested in what, so that they remember to follow-up with people if something relevant to them comes up. For example, if someone rides a bike, they may want to attend a public meeting about a relevant policy or apply to the Bicycle Committee when a spot opens. By having frequent and regular contact with community members, the Outreach Workers can be better informed about community needs and are able to better match people with opportunities.

1.3. Helping People Meet Their Own Needs

CET at CDD Outreach Workers aim to build trust by helping people meet their needs and connecting them to resources, regardless of which city department manages that resource. I

heard from the Community Engagement Manager (CEM), a Co-Leader of the Community Engagement Team at the Department of Human Service Programs (CET at DHSP), and a CET at CDD Outreach Worker that helping people meet their needs is critical to building trust and developing strong relationships. One Outreach Worker explained that helping people meet their needs is part of showing them that you are there for them and that you care. The Outreach Worker told me, “Even if we can’t help you at the CDD, we’ll try our hardest to find the right place to connect you to.”

This has turned out to be a bigger piece of the Outreach Worker’s responsibility than it was originally thought to be. The CEM said, “I don’t think anyone anticipated quite how much we’d need to know about other resources.” The CEM recalled:

“I’ve had the experience a couple of times of going out into the community and doing community engagement about something completely different. But I end up helping someone or learning about someone who has an urgent housing need that I did not know about.”

Housing, for example, is a category within the CDD’s scope of services that the CET gets a lot of questions about. Another category that they get questions about often is legal services which is beyond CDD’s scope. The Outreach Workers learn where to refer people so that they can get the appropriate support. This points to a larger need in the community that is beyond the scope of the CET. The CEM said it demonstrates the need for “more social workers and folks who do case management.” The CEM clarified that there is a difference between helping people get their needs met and meeting all their needs all the time. They explained that Outreach Workers do their best to refer people to resources that already exist elsewhere in the city, “We can’t meet all their needs. Boundaries are important for sustainable work, but we

have to know where to send them.” The CEM provided an example of why helping people meet their needs is so important to effective engagement. In the example the CEM provided, an Outreach Worker receives a question from someone in their community about a housing need. The Outreach Worker tells them about inclusionary housing, but the person does not qualify. If the Outreach Worker disappears until they ask the person to join a focus group, the person will likely not want anything to do with the focus group. Instead, the Outreach Worker needs to know where community members go to get other needs met too.

2. Creating An Environment for Feedback

CET at CDD Outreach Workers do both outreach and feedback, despite only “outreach” appearing in their title. CET at CDD Outreach Workers provide feedback in two main ways. One is that they work with CDD project managers to create more inclusive projects, programs, and processes. The other is that they attend CDD events and complete Event Report Surveys afterwards to document their experiences. The process of providing constructive feedback about planning practices requires that everyone involved continually work towards creating an environment that welcomes feedback. To do so, the Community Engagement Manager (CEM) supports the relationship between Outreach Workers and other CDD staff. Outreach Workers and other CDD staff participate in training about plain language and about working with the community. Outreach Workers learn about city planning processes by working with other CDD staff and by attending CDD events. Additionally, CET at CDD’s internal practices model the way for other CDD staff.

2.1. The Community Engagement Manager

The Community Engagement Manager (CEM) tries to create a space where CET at CDD Outreach Workers feel comfortable giving feedback to project managers. The CEM does this in several ways. They manage CET at CDD's activities and supervise Outreach Workers. They support the relationship between Outreach Workers and other staff. They help Outreach Workers keep track of their time and commitments because Outreach Workers are part-time staff. They help Outreach Workers learn about CDD programs and processes through weekly meetings. They also help other CDD staff learn to work with the CET. They lead or organize relevant trainings, including one for project managers about how to work with the CET. The CEM also works with the Community Engagement Advisory Group for CDD to address the Department's larger engagement strategy. For example, the Advisory Group developed the *Community Engagement Handbook* with the CEM.

2.2. Training

Additional community engagement processes occur concurrent with the outreach and feedback. CDD staff participate in other training based on city priorities, which currently include language justice and plain language. This training focuses on how staff can do better outreach and is understood by the Community Engagement Manager (CEM) to make it easier for the CET's outreach and feedback to occur.

One training that directly supports CET at CDD is the CDD project manager training. The CEM leads this training for project managers before they work with the CET. According to the CEM, the training reviews the process, "dos and don'ts" for working with the team and helps project managers imagine what kind of projects they could work on together. The CEM said

that it helps “establish some boundaries for the Outreach Workers time and for how we’re going to move.” Additionally, the Advisory Group is in the process of developing training for the Community Engagement Handbook with the CEM.

2.3. Learning About Community Development

CET at CDD Outreach Workers are learning about community development by working with project managers, discussing with the Community Engagement Manager (CEM), and by attending CDD events. During an interview, an Outreach Worker shared that they did not know the extent of resources that CDD offers before they began in their role. They said that some people in their community may know about or be interested in CDD’s housing division, but there are so many resources beyond that, “Everyone is so taken with housing, which I definitely understand, there’s nothing wrong with that. But to see what we provide. I’m just like, oh, my gosh! This is amazing and everybody needs to know it.”

At the weekly team meeting I attended, several Outreach Workers commented about how they had no idea what zoning was, but they now understand the purpose it serves. This came up again in my interview with the CEM who observed that Outreach Workers’ curiosity is one of the reasons why Outreach Workers are successful at CDD:

There is a deep curiosity and thirst to learn . . . You can go your whole life and not learn about zoning . . . But [Outreach Workers have] sincere curiosity and ability to get interested in lots of things . . . Maybe this is what they have most in common with one another.

Also, during the weekly meeting, an Outreach Worker expressed confusion about which project manager or event is in which division. The CEM responded and said that they will make a point to identify the division name for each project.

2.4. Intentional Practices Internal to the Planning Agency

The CET at CDD team has their own internal communication practices that shape how the team functions. For example, CET at CDD Outreach Workers and the Community Engagement Manager (CEM) have a group text message where they communicate frequently, ask questions, and share resources. After each team meeting the CEM sends a summary email. The communication practices were especially noticeable during the weekly team meeting I attended.

One focus of the weekly meeting I attended was a new department-wide filing system. The CEM took time during their weekly meeting to make sure everyone had the updated links and bookmarks on their computers. The CEM had Outreach Workers engage with the material by summarizing the instructions after they were given. The CEM shared their screen at the front of the room and led Outreach Workers through the changes. They took notes as they spoke and promised to send notes at the end of the meeting. Outreach Workers followed along on their own city-issued computers.

Data collection was another main point of discussion during the meeting I attended. The team collects data every month to track their impact. This includes a weekly report, a monthly report, and Event Report Surveys. These different data collection methods caused some confusion amongst the team. The Outreach Workers responded by asking questions of the CEM and of each other. One Outreach Worker shared a tip for how to track data and the CEM incorporated that into the workflow during the meeting. The CEM appeared flexible and ready to adapt to who shows up and how people react. Afterwards, the CEM explained, “Our

meetings are intentionally run to feel very different than other CDD meetings. It is a different pace. It is a different culture, is a different way of moving, and that's by design.”

2.5. Working with Project Managers

Other CDD staff collaborate with the CET at CDD Outreach Workers. Typically, the people who lead the workflow of a program or initiative are considered “project managers.” By working with the CET, project managers may have the opportunity to practice and improve their outreach skills. Project managers incorporate feedback from outreach workers into their specific project and potentially develop skills to use for future projects.

Requesting support from the CET is optional. First, the project managers submit a request to the Community Engagement Manager (CEM). Then, the CEM reviews their request for plain language and for a realistic timeline. If it is not in plain language, they send it back for revision. If the timeline is not practical, they may suggest a different timeline. If the request is only for a minor amount of feedback, the CEM may give it directly to the project manager. Outreach Workers are part-time, so the CEM tries to be mindful of their limitations. If the request warrants feedback that Outreach Workers have given multiple times before for other projects or processes, they may develop a resource that can be given off-the-shelf. For example, CET at CDD created a resource for CDD’s various boards and commissions about recruiting new members.

After the project has been approved by the CEM, the project manager attends one of the weekly CET at CDD meetings and presents their project to Outreach Workers. Sometimes Outreach Workers give feedback on the spot. A flyer for an Earth Day event is a good example of something they might critique immediately. While with longer term projects, they might

develop the project together. The Neighborhood Planning Initiative (NPI) is an example of a project that is more involved and longer term. CDD staff work with each neighborhood in Cambridge to develop and update a neighborhood plan. A project manager working on NPI may come back to the CET at CDD multiple times over the duration of the project for more information. One project manager I interviewed discussed the challenges of time constraints on planning projects.

According to one project manager, they are learning to factor in the time to collaborate with CET at CDD. They shared:

There's a momentum to the way that we schedule out things that makes you have to be intentional. It is sometimes a challenge to be mindful of the time that it takes to work with CET . . . that work should take time. And so you have to add that into the process and the projects that didn't account for that previously.

They explained that it was a bit of a learning curve but not an insurmountable one. They shared what they have done to change their workflows to incorporate feedback:

I think the communication and planning at the front, and then, being kind of nimble and being willing to push deadlines back helps overcome that challenge of it being a new piece of what we do.

2.6. Event Report Surveys

CET at CDD Outreach Workers attend CDD events and they complete an Event Report Survey to document their experience at the event. Through the Event Report Surveys, Outreach Workers practice reflecting on their experience and giving written feedback. An Event Report Survey asks Outreach Workers whether the event was virtual or in person, what time the event was held, and if anyone from their community attended. It asks how the event was “welcoming” and “unwelcoming” to members of their community. It also asks what could have made information easier to understand. Finally, it provides a scale to rate how welcoming and

inclusive the event was. This data had not been analyzed before and the feedback has not yet been delivered to the relevant staff.

3. Feedback from Outreach Workers to Project Managers about Communication

Through my research, I found that the CET at CDD model seeks to improve planning practices through feedback about communication between project managers and the community. Feedback tended to be technical critiques centered on language and understanding. Examples of this include identifying graphics that are not readable, clarifying intent behind technical language, or observing a presenter speaking too fast. CET at CDD Outreach Workers also frequently offered specific suggestions for improving communication along with their feedback. Examples of suggestions include recommending translation services and requesting presenters speak slower. Additionally, the Event Report Surveys provide a unique opportunity to learn more about what makes members of historically excluded communities feel welcome.

Table 1: Data Collection Methods and Sources for Feedback.

Method	Source of feedback	Quantity
Interview	CET at CDD Outreach Worker	2 Interviews
Interview	Community Engagement Manager	1 Interview
Interview	CDD Project Manager	2 Interviews
Meeting Observation	CET at CDD Outreach Workers (4) Community Engagement Manager	1 Meeting
Event Report Survey	CET at CDD Outreach Workers (6)	47 Surveys

I found that most feedback was ultimately about communication and could fit into one or more of the following categories: translation, culture, vocabulary, and speech. I coded feedback that I received through 47 Event Report Surveys completed over several months by 6 Outreach Workers, 2 interviews with project managers, 2 interviews with CET at CDD Outreach Workers, an interview with the Community Engagement Manager (CEM), and observation of a weekly CET at CDD meeting. Some of the content I analyzed was secondhand from the CEM or a project manager about the type of feedback that Outreach Workers provide, however, the majority of content was feedback directly from Outreach Workers through interviews, meeting observation, and the Event Report Survey. I did additional research for this chapter, including speaking with the Co-Leader for the Community Engagement Team at Department of Human Service Programs (CET at DHSP) and reviewing the Community Engagement Handbook. However, these were not sources of feedback so they are not included in this section of the chapter unless noted otherwise.

Table 2: Frequency of Feedback Themes.

Category	Frequency
Translation	16
Culture	15
Vocabulary	12
Speech	11

3.1. Translation

The largest area of feedback from Outreach Workers to project managers was about translation. Translation was mentioned 16 times. It was mentioned in Event Report Surveys more than it was in interviews or observation. I read in the *Community Engagement Handbook* and I heard from both a project manager and the Community Engagement Manager that CET at CDD Outreach Workers are not translators but they may review translations for specific projects. A project manager also explained that Outreach Workers may advise when to use translation, “They might be able to tell us what might be especially useful to do for the sake of translation.” Outreach Workers’ comments on the Event Report Survey were generally critical of the absence of translation, while one praised an event for offering translation. Examples of the comments from Outreach Workers on the Event Report Survey include:

“To make the meeting more welcoming, perhaps it could be translated to [my language].”

“Because of limited English, some people may not participate.”

“If everyone had a computer with Wi-Fi and real time translation, the classes would have been perfect.”

“Really appreciate that this event had a simultaneous translation into [my language], in the zoom there was an option to access it, however, the indications of how to activate it were a little confusing . . . I appreciate the translation, but it should have a better explanation of how to use it.”

“The flyers said come and ask your question, but since they were translated into [my language] and other languages, I thought there would be translators.”

3.2. Culture

Culture was mentioned 15 times in the feedback about CET at CDD. Outreach Workers did not mention culture much in the Event Report Surveys, but it did come up more often during interviews and in the meeting I observed. A Co-Leader of the Community Engagement

Team at the Department of Human Service Programs (CET at DHSP) gave an example of the role of culture in outreach that could be addressed by getting Outreach Workers' feedback:

“Let's say that they want to specifically target the Amharic-speaking community. What should they do for this event? Should they offer an incentive? How does that work? Because there's different cultural nuances depending on the community.”

When CET at CDD Outreach Workers talked about culture, they were less explicit than the example above from a CET at DHSP Co-Leader. They shared information about practices without specifically calling it “culture.” One Outreach Worker said that each community faces different challenges and has different relationships, and they each deserve attention. The Outreach Worker said:

There is a lot of work to be done . . . and if we are sincere about it . . . we have to really stay on the task and develop those tools . . . You have to know your priorities, and you have to know when to communicate, and when to stop.

One project manager was working on an initiative considering off-leash dog hours in certain parks, and they learned from an Outreach Worker about that Outreach Worker's community's general discomfort around dogs. The project manager said, “I know people who dislike dogs, but I don't know anyone who has an aversion that might be rooted in something deeper.” In another example, a project manager reported getting feedback on the format in which they should share information for a specific community. They were advised by a few Outreach Workers to share information through WhatsApp because that is how members of their communities frequently communicate, “A lot of people in their community use WhatsApp. And so we should be thinking about how what we are making could be shared best over WhatsApp.”

3.3. Vocabulary

There were 12 instances of feedback about vocabulary. The Community Engagement Manager (CEM), shared that CET at CDD can help make documents more accessible, “Most of planning and a lot of the documents that we produce . . . aren’t in plain language and aren’t accessible.” The project manager I spoke with expressed a similar sentiment, “Having that group of people to work with on being clear, understandable, and getting to the point of why they should care about it has been really helpful.” In the Event Report Survey, Outreach Workers commented about the use of technical terms or advanced vocabulary at CDD events. Outreach Workers also suggested that staff use terms that members of their community would understand. Examples of the comments received in the Event Report Survey include:

“Provide some type of definition or explanation to some technical words.”

“[They] can simplify certain topics in their work by the use of the plain language.”

“The level of the discussion was [so] elevated that an average person [wouldn’t] understand.”

3.4. Speech

The fourth most common area of feedback was speech, with 11 mentions. Most comments were about the speed with which someone spoke. A Co-Leader of the Community Engagement Team at the Department of Human Service Programs (CET at DHSP) said, “We slow things down here. I may ask you to pause for repeat, check for understanding.” I saw similarities in the feedback about CET at CDD. CET at CDD Outreach Workers’ comments in the Event Report Survey include:

“The people spoke too fast, and some people who do not speak English well can’t attend.”

“Speak Slowly: Some participants gave me feedback and expressed their difficulty in understanding because the Speaker was speaking so quick.”

“It was difficult for me to understand. People spoke very fast with lots of details.”

3.5. Making CDD Events Welcoming

The Event Report Survey asks questions about what made the event welcoming or unwelcoming to members of the Outreach Worker’s community. It also asks Outreach Workers to rate how welcoming and inclusive the CDD event was from 1 to 5, with 1 being “not welcome” and 5 being “very welcoming, information easy to understand.” The data on welcoming and numerous concrete suggestions for how to improve events could be a great resource for the CDD to study what can be done to create spaces where community members feel heard, seen, and included.

3.5.1. Feeling Welcome at CDD Events

Like the other forms of feedback, the data on welcoming is largely about communication and understanding. It also includes specific details about meeting structures and best practices that could be useful. Feedback included 51 references to feeling welcomed. These references were either in response to a question about feeling welcome, “Was this event welcoming to members of your community?” or they were explicit mentions of feeling welcome from another part of the survey. Sometimes the feedback was how the Outreach Workers felt and other times it was how they thought members of their communities would feel. Examples of what made Outreach Workers feel welcome included the choice of attending meetings in person or virtually, interactive content, access to resources, opportunity to ask

questions, serving food, and offering translation services. Outreach Workers' comments in the Event Report Survey include:

"The fact that [the meeting] was hybrid, it gave the audience choice of attending in person or virtual through Zoom."

"The meeting was an open discussion between the CDD staff and all the working group participants."

"Gave informative resources."

"The timing of the event, it took place after regular working hours."

"Was open to questions."

"Great opportunity to express your opinion and concerns."

"There was simple dinner available with pizza, sub, salad, and water."

"The meeting was informative and gave enough time for everyone's feedback. About half of the people spoke."

"Checking if the audience was understanding."

3.5.2. Feeling Unwelcome at CDD Events

Feedback included 44 references to feeling unwelcome. These were either in response to a question about feeling unwelcome, "How could this event have been more welcoming to members of your community? What could have made the information presented more clear?" or they were explicit mentions of feeling unwelcome from another part of the survey. Reasons why Outreach Workers reported feeling unwelcome or assumed that members of their community would feel unwelcome included several of the themes already addressed: lack of translation, discrepancy in cultural norms, use of technical language, and the presenter speaking too fast. It also included not seeing their community represented. Examples include:

"The public participation or questions was very limited."

“Allow waiting time: The event started on time, and with it the information, people who arrived two minutes late could have missed the introduction and the instructions given by the speaker.”

“I think it would have been better if the CDD staff and the committee [leading the event] had their name or badge to identify who are permanent people and who are new people, this would make people feel welcome and be able to talk to each other.”

“I think if I was telling people to come, I would need to give an explanation of what this entails. Given when you go it just gets right into business.”

“It is not a welcoming meeting, because I think peoples from our community don’t have that much language skill to understand the meeting.”

“My experience was not very good, because at the beginning I asked if anyone spoke [my language], just to make sure that the people I had shared the information with understood. But there was no one who spoke [my language]. I was attended [to] by a speaker [of another language].”

“Could be more inviting and welcoming to a member of my community if they have some representation and some familiar faces within the community.”

3.5.3. Welcoming Scale

The last question of the Event Report Survey asks Outreach Workers to rate how welcome they felt at the event, “How welcoming and inclusive was this event?” The scale is from 1 to 5, with 1 being “not welcome” and 5 being “very welcoming, information easy to understand.” The first 15 surveys I received were from the first iteration of the Event Report Survey, which did not ask this question, so those appear under “unknown.” The other 32 surveys span from 1 to 5 (see Table 3), with a mode of 3, and a median of 3. Outreach Workers gave relatively few low responses. Nearly half of the responses fell in the middle of the scale. Yet over a third gave high responses.

Table 3: Welcoming Scale Frequency.

Welcoming Scale	Frequency	Percentage
1	1	3 %
2	3	9%
3	15	47%
4	3	9%
5	10	31%
Unknown	15	N/A

3.5.4. Outreach Workers' Suggestions About Events

CET at CDD Outreach Workers generally included a suggestion with their critique. From 47 Event Report Surveys, there were 62 suggestions. Some suggestions may be more feasible than others, but it could be beneficial for CDD to review this feedback and consider what may be possible to address with training or other solutions. Outreach Workers suggested ways that event leaders could better advertise events, explain the event's purpose, and encourage participation in an event. Several suggestions are provided above as part of critiques about welcomeness, but other suggestions offered include:

Maybe the members should take a few minutes to explain what the Planning Board is. They read the agenda and do a roll call of their members, but it would be clearer if it was explained, of course it must be very tiring for members who already know the process to have to explain every week the process, but for new people coming to hear about the projects it would be very useful.

To speak you have to raise your hand and wait for someone to approve you to use the microphone, but maybe people could participate more if the chat was open and a board member is in charge of it. It is less intimidating to chat and also more open access

If there is some flyer about the event, it would get more people's attention.

If they could offer transcript caption [in my language], it has been more welcoming to my community.

4. Use of Outreach Worker Feedback to Improve Processes for Participation in Planning

CET at CDD Outreach Workers and project managers have collaborated on a number of projects since the initiative started. The Community Engagement Manager (CEM) said that CET at CDD and their feedback has generally been received well. The CEM shared:

We're often told we're the best meeting someone's been to all week. There's been a real openness to hearing our feedback and willingness to then reimagine things based on our feedback that has been really validating.

The CEM added the caveat that everyone who works with the CET chooses to go through the process, it is not mandatory. Several project managers have had the opportunity to work with the CET at CDD and have shared the impact the experience has had on their practice so far. I was able to speak with one, and the CEM shared information they received from others.

The project manager I spoke with explained that by working with the CET they learned how to design better outreach for the communities that they needed to focus on for their initiative. They shared that Outreach Workers bring a different and valuable perspective to the work:

[Outreach Workers] see things that we wouldn't have caught partially because we just been working on it for so long . . . but also because they bring a personal experience and come from communities that I don't come from, and oftentimes my colleagues don't come from.

Revisiting the example I included in the previous section about culture, one project manager conveyed they learned about the distinctive methods of advertising events in each community.

For example several Outreach Workers shared that people in their communities use WhatsApp

to share information. The project manager adapted their messaging so that it was easy to copy and paste in a WhatsApp message. They said:

We have a pretty well-trodden way of doing outreach . . . we do flyers, lawn signs, and we can do mailers and social media. When we presented those materials to the Community Engagement Team, one of the first things back to us was that . . . a lot of people in their community use WhatsApp . . . so we should be thinking about how what we are making could be shared best on WhatsApp.

As a result, the project team created resources about their project in a format that could be shared through WhatsApp. Outreach Workers then shared that resource with their own communities as part of an outreach project.

In another example, the project manager explained that they learned about one community engagement method they had been using— door knocking. They learned that because of their appearance, they might be received differently by people at home at different times of the day. For example, in this specific community they learned from an Outreach Worker that there may be quite a few women home during the day taking care of family members. If the project manager is, for example, a white male dressed a certain way, they may not be welcomed. They may not be seen as trustworthy. This impacted the project manager's perceptions of when and how to use door knocking as a strategy for the specific community they wanted to target.

The project manager reported feeling challenged to think more deeply about their work. It allowed them to practice talking about the significance of their work in terms that people outside of community development would understand, "When we go out into the city, we have to be really well-versed in how to explain what we're doing and why it's important to people who have never heard of it before." They gave an example about a survey they were preparing

to send out. The project manager recognized that people are busy, and their survey was likely not high on people's list of importance. However, talking with Outreach Workers helped clarify why it is crucial to get input from underrepresented communities. The project manager said that working with CET at CDD helps to "reinforce that the work we do here is important." They added:

[The challenge is] actually connecting the dots between what we're asking when we do community engagement and how we get to the most important points as clearly as possible.

The CEM made a similar observation about clarifying the purpose of engagement:

Oftentimes when project managers come to us to present, they realize that they need to get clearer on what the project is or how to talk about the project with the public, or what the purpose of engagement is.

In these examples, Outreach Worker feedback provided a project manager with specific information about communicating across linguistic and cultural differences. The project manager I spoke with shared that they were able to take the information they received and incorporate it into their planning projects. While feedback is given for specific projects, the CEM expressed hope that project managers may learn lessons that inform their future work as well.

5. Critiques of the CET Model and Hopes for the Future

In each of my interviews, people were eager to talk about the future of CET at CDD. They were excited to express their hopes and dreams for the model and for their place in community development. There is a desire for simplifying data collection and exploring which additional communities may need representation. There are challenges with time constraints and the fact that CET at CDD Outreach Worker positions are part-time. I also heard people introduce some bigger, philosophical questions about the difference between access and

participation and about who should be responsible for relationship building with the community and culture change within CDD.

5.1. Simplifying Data Collection

During the CET at CDD meeting that I observed, Outreach Workers expressed confusion with how they are expected to track their outreach, event attendance, and participation in the different forms of feedback to project managers. Outreach Workers complete a weekly report, a monthly report, and the Event Report Survey after each CDD event that they attend. The Community Engagement Manager (CEM) was actively working with Outreach Workers on understanding the data collection process at the meeting I observed. Outreach Workers asked questions about the process and purpose of data collection and the CEM incorporated Outreach Workers' feedback in the moment. The CEM explained why the data collection was set up this way and this seemed to lessen some frustration. Monthly reports are more quantitative while weekly reports are more qualitative. Data collection is to demonstrate just how much work CET at CDD is doing. It is also to identify patterns before they become problematic. For example, the CEM wants to see if CDD's requests for support from CET at CDD are clustered at certain times of the year. The CEM concluded that simplifying data collection could help to share information from Outreach Workers' past work and inform their future work.

5.2. Expanding Representation

Currently, the focus of CET at CDD is on racial and linguistic communities. This is the focus of the Community Engagement Team at the Department of Human Service Programs (CET

at DHSP), where the model originated. The Community Engagement Manager (CEM), a project manager, and an Outreach Worker all suggested that this be considered again in the future to potentially include more “underheard and underserved” communities. The categories I heard mentioned were youth, older adults, and people with disabilities. The CEM said:

I would love to be able to expand to have a youth-focused outreach worker. So, someone who is an adult, but who is able to then run a team of youth outreach workers or youth council or something like that.

The CEM also shared:

I would love to think about having an outreach who is an older adult, and also is able to connect with other older adults, and that is really their focus, and could collaborate with other outreach workers across communities, but that there was a focus on that.

When I spoke with a Co-Leader of the Community Engagement Team at the Department of Human Service Programs (CET at DHSP) they said:

We get a lot of feedback and a lot of stuff about disability. People really want an outreach team for disabilities, and I don't know what that looks like. But it's needed . . . they need access to resources, too.

The CET at DHSP Co-Leader also suggested, “Maybe there's multiple CETs across departments . . . maybe if there's a few more teams we can specialize.”

5.3. Full-Time Outreach Workers

CET at CDD Outreach Workers are part-time employees, which both allows for flexibility and also presents other challenges. They work 19.5 hours per week and they can, for the most part, choose which events to attend in addition to their weekly team meeting. They can decide where and when to do outreach. Both Outreach Workers I spoke with said that they were looking for part-time jobs when they found the position with the CET at CDD. They have other responsibilities and they needed part-time work. One of the Outreach Workers I spoke with

said, “I think the best part of it is the flexibility, being able to kind of make your own schedule and go along with it.”

Key stakeholders said that the part-time hours are good for some, but it limits how much the CET can do overall. One project manager observed that Outreach Workers’ part-time status also makes it more difficult to integrate them into CDD. The project manager explained that Outreach Workers do not have a designated office or desk. The project manager shared:

They're not in the office as much, so I do think there's a bit of a challenge with overcoming that bit of a gap where we're trying to integrate them much more fully into the work that we do, but that's new to all of us . . . including them in our work can be a bit of a challenge.

One Outreach Worker said that they want more time to do their work. They said that they would like to see the CDD, “either giving us more hours so that we can really work within the community or getting another outreach worker for [my community].” Another Outreach Worker said there is so much work to be done and they think Outreach Workers could represent their communities better if they were full-time, “I can see there is great potential that it can be done better . . . this position can be developed to a full-time position.” The Community Engagement Manager (CEM) said, “We need more capacity and more time.” According to a Co-Leader of the Community Engagement Team at the Department of Human Service Programs (CET at DHSP), two of the eleven CET at DHSP Outreach Workers are full-time, setting a precedent for the CDD to explore the possibility of one or more full-time Outreach Workers. The CET at DHSP Co-Leader explained, “Because our team is so big they help me with the day to day meetings and administrative stuff and they also work in the capacity of outreach workers.”

Additionally, the part-time role does not come with the same benefits as a full-time role. The CEM observed that the department should consider how the Outreach Workers are paid in the future, “We need to compensate people in a way that they are able to make this their long-term professional, full time, career, and support their families, and be able to afford to live and work in Cambridge.”

5.4. Levels of Participation

Participation seemed to mean different things to different people. One difference I observed was whether it was the responsibility of Outreach Workers to improve their community’s access to information or to increase their community’s participation in CDD programs, projects, and processes. I heard people share that the goal of the CET at CDD is to increase participation, but then when they elaborated, the question of access vs. participation came up. During the CET at CDD meeting that I attended, an Outreach Worker commented that getting people to show up is harder than sharing information with people. The two Outreach Workers I interviewed said that their main responsibility is to share information. Both shared that they want their communities to have access to information so they can decide if they want to participate. The Community Engagement Manager (CEM) demonstrated that they are thinking about this issue as well, “I push a little bit . . . as to what do we mean by community engagement, because sometimes what we're actually saying is notification.”

Another issue that I heard brought up was about how deeply communities should be involved in decision-making. A project manager worked with the Community Engagement Team at the Department of Human Service Programs (CET at DHSP) before CET at CDD started. The

project manager explained that it is easier to collaborate with a CET dedicated to CDD. The project manager said:

The difference having them in-house in the Community Development Department versus working with DHSP was we hadn't established that same sort of like in depth co-creating the process . . . instead of just like kind of asking them to do something without their input into whether or not we should do that or how we should do it.

While there is more co-creating happening than before CET at CDD, this project manager has hopes of working more closely with Outreach Workers to include them in decision making from the beginning. The project manager said:

When we're talking about community engagement, we're talking to them about what our goals for community engagement are, and then we can work together to figure out what the best ways to reach those goals are, instead of internally without the CET working on our goals, figuring out what engagement methods we want to use, and then coming to CET saying, we want to use these engagement methods . . . So, I think it's that kind of inviting them in and working with them on that one step deeper into the process about being sure that we're including them more in decision making.

One Outreach Worker shared a similar desire to see communities in Cambridge represented further. They explained that they feel they are in between the CDD and their community:

I describe my work as a mid-person between the divisions of the CDD and the community, communicating all the future projects through flyers, text messages, social media . . . but at the same time getting feedback from the community to the CDD and project managers.

The Outreach Worker said they were dissatisfied with being in the middle and wanted to see representation on a deeper level. The Outreach Worker added, "If the City of Cambridge is sincere . . . it has to develop this department, and to do some real work and some real representation." They observed that Boards tend to represent certain groups that have had a voice for many years and they see more representation of marginalized communities as "the

path for those communities to have access to the information and have access to decisions in the City of Cambridge and be part of the future vision of the city.”

Summary

Through my observations, I found that the CET at CDD model aims to use a combination of outreach and feedback to increase participation for underheard, underserved, and historically excluded communities in Cambridge. The model attempts to address community access through outreach and CDD’s internal processes through feedback. Outreach Workers are central to the model and connect the communities they represent with the CDD’s projects, programs, and processes. The model emphasizes building credibility through outreach by relying on a trusted community member—Outreach Workers—to build long-term relationships with community members by helping them meet their needs. It also seeks to create an environment that welcomes feedback by having oversight and leadership from a Community Engagement Manager, providing training to both Outreach Workers and other CDD staff, educating Outreach Workers about community development, practicing intentional internal processes, working closely with project managers, and collecting Event Report Surveys. First impressions of the model show that the feedback produced is largely about communication across languages and cultural differences. It also shows that project managers see the value of feedback to their work. Additionally, first impressions highlight the importance of larger conversations about the Outreach Worker role and community representation.

V. Discussion of Findings and Implications for Planning

Current scholarship calls on planners to engage underrepresented communities while providing insufficient information about communicating across cultural and linguistic differences (American Planning Association, 2021; Einstein et al., 2019; Harwood, 2022). There are numerous obstacles to engaging underrepresented groups and not enough empirical research about what is effective. There is also inadequate research on the role that language and culture play in community engagement. This study attempts to address that gap by documenting a new model for public participation that seeks to center language and culture – the Cambridge Community Development Department’s Community Engagement Team (CET at CDD).

The primary objective of this research was to identify the theory of change behind the CET at CDD model. Through this research, I also sought to investigate how the model addresses language justice and cultural differences. I set out to examine the role Outreach Workers are supposed to play in building relationships between the CDD and their communities. Additionally, I wanted to document first impressions of the model and consider the model’s application for city planning. Overall, I found that the key stakeholders—the Outreach Workers, project managers, and Community Engagement Manager (CEM)—generally had positive comments about the model and its promise for engaging members of Outreach Workers’ communities. In this chapter, I will discuss the findings about the CET at CDD model’s theory of change and draw connections between these findings and previously established knowledge. I

will examine these aspects of the model and identify key takeaways. I will address the limitations of my research.

Theory of Change

This study found that the CET at CDD model is designed to increase marginalized community members' participation in planning processes. The model is built on the assumption that, to increase participation, the CDD first needs to gain the trust of people they seek to engage. The model is designed to strengthen trust by hiring people from the identified communities to work directly for the CDD part-time as Outreach Workers. Outreach Workers are understood to be leaders in their communities and experts on their communities' cultural practices and needs.

Outreach Workers are supposed to do outreach to the communities they are part of by sharing information about CDD events and programs and attending CDD events. They are supposed to tailor their outreach to specific community needs. Through outreach, the model's premise is that communities will learn about what the CDD does and how it is relevant to them. The model is built on the assumption that community members need to feel like Outreach Workers care, and by extension the CDD cares, about helping them get their needs met. This study revealed that helping community members meet their needs sometimes means knowing which city departments and nonprofits to direct people to when those needs are beyond the scope of the CDD.

According to the model, Outreach Workers give feedback to project managers by working with them to design engagement and by attending project managers' events and completing Event Report Surveys. By giving their feedback, Outreach Workers are supposed to

educate project managers on what inclusive planning processes look like for Outreach Workers' respective communities.

Additionally, another assumption that the model relies on is that this collaboration requires creating an environment that supports feedback. Specifically, that project managers are receptive to feedback, and that Outreach Workers have the desire and tools to learn about CDD processes. Outreach Workers are supposed to learn about the CDD by attending CDD events, working with project managers on community engagement for planning projects, and through formal training. Project managers are supposed to learn about Outreach Workers' communities by working with Outreach Workers to design engagement for their planning projects and through formal training. One area of training for both Outreach Workers and for project managers is plain language.

Contribution to Scholarship on Participation

This study shows that the CET at CDD model goes beyond the current planning scholarship in several ways. First, this study begins to address the gap in the literature about how language justice can be incorporated into public planning processes. It provides an alternative to existing models for participation such as those offered by Allen and Slotterback (2021) that suggest agencies leverage relationships with community organizations. Instead, it introduces the idea that what Umemoto (2001) refers to as "cultural translators" can provide agencies additional benefits with they are within the agencies. It also identifies that helping people meet their needs over a long period of time is a critical component of developing trust between community members and this planning agency.

Language and Culture

The results of the study show that the CET at CDD model is designed to address language justice and navigate cultural differences through both direct outreach to community members and internal feedback to project managers about the planning process. Training in language justice and plain language aims to provide Outreach Workers and project managers with a common understanding that makes feedback from Outreach Workers to the planning project managers possible. Initial observations and key actors' reflections indicate the potential usefulness of centering language and culture when planning with underserved communities.

Language justice is the right to communicate, to understand, and to be understood in the language in which one chooses to communicate (Antena Aire, 2020). There is no empirical research about how language justice relates to participation in planning. Developed by the Highlander Center and grassroots movements, it is now being utilized by other types of organizations, including the City of Cambridge (City of Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2022b; Highlander Research and Education Center, 2021). One way that the CET at CDD model seeks to address Cambridge's language justice goals is through direct outreach. Through regular outreach, members of Outreach Workers' communities can learn about CDD's programs, projects, and processes from someone who speaks their language. Each Outreach Worker is a member of the community that they represent. They speak the language and they are familiar with the culture.

Another way the model works towards language justice is through internal feedback processes among Outreach Workers and project managers. This finding supports evidence from Umemoto (2001) that individual community members can help planners design effective

processes and connect with historically excluded communities by being “cultural translators.” Cultural translators work between the planning organization and the community. Outreach Workers offer insights to project managers into how Outreach Workers’ communities want to be communicated with and how to adapt established participatory processes accordingly. Then, it is up to project managers to implement those processes. For example, if Outreach Workers recommend that an event offer translation, it is up to the project manager to hire language workers to translate.

However, communicating across languages in planning processes is not as simple as knowing how to translate. Although according to initial CET at CDD feedback, translation is a critical component. Initial observations and key actors' reflections shows that effective communication also includes culture, vocabulary, and speech. Outreach Workers offer specific and actionable feedback about how to communicate more effectively with the communities they represent.

For the CET at CDD, Outreach Workers are cultural translators working between the Community Development Department (CDD) and their communities. They give project managers feedback about how to navigate cultural expectations as well as what Umemoto (2001) calls the “manifestation of cultural difference in the use of language.” In other words, Outreach Workers help project managers understand nuance and meaning in language and other forms of communication.

Additionally, this case study shows that Outreach Workers bring explicit knowledge of their communities and tacit knowledge from personal experience to their work. Research has shown that it is challenging to capture tacit knowledge in participatory processes (Moore &

Elliott, 2016). Through feedback to project managers, Outreach Workers offer information that may be difficult for other staff members to capture otherwise. One example of this is the Event Report Survey question about feeling welcome. Welcomeness is subjective, and responses to this question are informed by Outreach Workers' experiences.

Initial feedback from Outreach Workers' completed Event Report Surveys indicated that speed of project managers speech is one of the biggest communication challenges for project managers communication with members of Outreach Workers' communities. The team prioritizes clear communication and understanding.

Building Relationships

This study found that relationship-building is at the heart of the CET at CDD model. While clarity is needed on the larger purpose of Outreach Workers' outreach activities, the CET at CDD model seeks to build relationships between the public and the CDD through Outreach Workers who work directly for the CDD. In addition, initial impressions from Outreach Workers, the CEM, and project managers suggest that the processes of the CET at CDD model build community among individuals in these three roles.

This study found that the CET at CDD model seeks to develop capacity internally for inclusive public participation in planning processes by employing people part-time from the target communities. Scholars have found that immigrants can be distrustful of agencies, but may trust partner organizations (Allen & Slotterback, 2021; Harwood, 2022). Previous models for working across cultural differences suggests planning agencies leverage relationships with partner organizations (Allen & Slotterback, 2021; Harwood, 2022). Instead, this study found that the CET at CDD model directly employs members of the community to work for and

represent the CDD. Using Fung's (2006) Democracy Cube framework, Outreach Workers are most like what Fung (2006) calls professional stakeholders. Fung explains that lay stakeholders are unpaid and participate because they care about a specific cause, whereas professional stakeholders are typically paid representatives of organized interests (Fung, 2006). While the Outreach Workers do not represent an organized body, they are understood to be leaders in their respective communities and are thus expected to represent the needs of their communities to project managers. They are supposed to speak to their communities' engagement needs, and not their communities' planning needs. Outreach Workers advise project managers about how to better engage Outreach Workers' communities so project managers can choose the right level of participation. Then, project managers conduct public participation processes to get community input, sometimes with more Outreach Worker support. Project managers are what Fung refers to as technical experts. They can choose to give Outreach Workers more authority and more influence over decisions, but it is ultimately their decision whether to involve the CET at CDD and how to involve them.

This study confirms Allen and Slotterback's (2021) finding that relational planning shows more promise than transactional. However, there were differences in how Outreach Workers, the CEM, and project managers talked about Outreach Workers' responsibility to the CDD and their communities. There were also differences in how people talked about the purpose of building stronger relationships between CDD and Outreach Workers' communities. Some suggested that Outreach Workers' main objective is to improve their community's access to the CDD's programs, projects, and processes. Others said Outreach Workers' main objective is to increase participation of members of Outreach Workers' communities in CDD programs,

projects, and processes. This variation in the interpretation of the purpose of outreach work may be the result of different goals for different projects. It also may be explained by variation in perspective between people of various backgrounds or in different roles with their own specific motivations.

This study found that the internal processes of the CET between Outreach Workers, project managers, and the CEM create what Quick and Feldman (2011) refer to as a “community of practice” where people create community by learning together. In this study, Outreach Workers, project managers, and the CEM develop their engagement and outreach practices together. While individuals in each of those three roles appeared to learn from one another, one of the most notable findings is that project managers reported thinking more intentionally about participation in planning projects, programs, and processes.

The preliminary study found that the CET at CDD helps project managers clarify the purpose of their engagement and tailor the design of their engagement through three practices. First, the clarification of their purpose and design of community engagement processes occurs through the course of requesting support from CET at CDD. The project manager must submit a request to the CEM with an explanation of the project’s community engagement goals. Second, clarification of the purpose of engagement processes happens when a project manager explains the project to Outreach Workers during their first meeting together. The CEM explained that just the act of explaining the project is helpful: “Oftentimes when project managers come to us to present, they realize that they need to get clearer on what the project is or how to talk about the project with the public, or what the purpose of

engagement is.” Third, feedback from Outreach Worker challenges project managers to think more deeply about the purpose of participation of Outreach Workers’ communities in planning.

Building Trust and Investing Time

This study found that there are several main components to building trust with community members through the CET at CDD model and they each require significant investment of hours over a long period of time. The results of this study show that the CET at CDD model aims to build trust by employing a trusted community member. Outreach Workers are members of the community that they serve. Another component is cultivating long-term relationships between Outreach Workers and community members as well as outreach workers and project managers. Outreach Workers strive to develop regular processes for participation. These two findings are in line with scholarship that says building trust through a community member can engage immigrants, language minorities, and other underserved communities in planning (Allen & Slotterback, 2021; Lee, 2019; Umemoto, 2001).

Most striking was that the CET at CDD model goes beyond the current planning scholarship and identifies another relevant component of building trust: helping people meet their needs. By listening to people and helping them meet their needs, even if it means going beyond the purview of the planning department, the CET seek to build trust. CET at CDD Outreach Workers focus on outreach for CDD projects and programs, but they are aware of other resources in the city to which they can direct community members who need additional support getting their basic needs met. For example, Outreach Workers reported receiving questions about housing and legal services, and Outreach Workers direct them to the relevant city department or to a local nonprofit that can better address those needs.

The CET focuses on communities that have been excluded from other government resources, not just those provided by community development. They do not necessarily trust the government to serve them. As one Outreach Worker told me, “It takes us a long time for us to warm up, and think, you’re actually here to help us, not get something from us.” Helping a member of their community find a resource they need shows that the Outreach Worker cares.

The importance to the CET at CDD model of dedicating considerable hours over a long period of time was also evident in their internal processes. This finding is in line with Quick and Feldman (2011) who found that community members were more satisfied when they had high levels of inclusion than they were with high rates of participation. Time plays a role in Outreach Worker relationships with each other and with project managers, not just in their work with community members. The team meetings are designed to take as much time as is needed to communicate clearly and address the subject at hand. Project managers, Outreach Workers, and the Community Engagement Manager all expressed their understanding that these processes cannot be hurried. The Community Engagement Manager (CEM) explained that work with project managers must build in the appropriate amount of time to address that priority. A project manager pointed out that working with the CET at CDD takes time. They said: “There's a momentum to the way that we schedule out things that makes you have to be intentional.” Despite the attention paid to taking enough time, there was a desire for more time. Outreach Workers are part-time employees. One Outreach Worker observed that there is so much work to be done that they thought they could represent their community better if they were full-time. These findings suggest that time is essential to all components of meaningful engagement.

Limitations of the CET at CDD Model

While initial impressions of the CET model were positive, the model does have a few limitations. Research has shown that planning organizations benefit from working with community organizations on public participation processes, but this study found that the CET at CDD model relies on individual Outreach Workers chosen by the CDD instead of formal partnerships with other organizations to design engagement processes (Allen & Slotterback, 2021). Another limitation of this approach is that it does not consider the demographics of planning staff (other than the Outreach Team). The American Planning Association (2019) reports that demographics of planners are less diverse than the communities they serve, but the CET at CDD model does not directly address the demographics CDD staff and how those experiences may impact their work as planners.

In addition, the CET at CDD approach leaves decision-making up to the project manager. Fung's (2006) Democracy Cube offers a useful framework for understanding the CET at CDD model's dimensions of engagement. According to Fung, the Democracy Cube presents three variables of public engagement: "(1) who participates, (2) how they communicate and make decisions, and (3) the extent of their influence over social actions and public decisions" (Fung, 2015, p. 515). For projects that choose to involve the CET at CDD, the model dictates that Outreach Workers participate in the design of public participation processes. However, consideration of the Outreach Workers' perspectives is left to the discretion of the project manager. The CET model does not explicitly give decision-making authority to the Outreach Team.

Limitations of the Study

The study of the Community Engagement Team at the Community Development Department (CET at CDD) is limited by several factors. The study had a small sample size. It did not include any members of the underrepresented communities and therefore it did not capture the communities' experiences with Outreach Workers and outreach activities. This study was intended to document the theory of change as well as the first impressions of the CDD staff involved. Findings from initial feedback should be interpreted with caution.

Since a focus of the study was the model's potential utility to the Community Development Department, I limited my sample to CDD staff including CET at CDD Outreach Workers, project managers, and the Community Engagement Manager. I interviewed two of five possible Outreach Workers. A sixth Outreach Worker was on leave during the study. A seventh Outreach Worker position is available and not currently filled. I interviewed two project managers who had both elected to work with the CET on their projects. The CET at CDD is an optional process. Project managers are not required to work with the CET. There are dozens of project managers who work for CDD, although only a fraction have worked with the CET so far. I did not interview project managers who have not yet opted to work with the CET.

This study yielded a lot of information about how Outreach Workers work with CDD project managers. Less information was collected about what exactly the model strives to accomplish through stronger relationships between Outreach Workers and their communities. There are several possible explanations for why this information about the model's goals was not captured in this study. One potential explanation for the variation is that the purpose of outreach varies from project to project. Each project is led by a project manager who ultimately

decides what role Outreach Workers or members of the public have in shaping the process.

Another potential explanation is that it is easier to document feedback to program managers than outreach in a short-term study. Additionally, I did not observe the outreach work directly and did not interview community members about their experience with outreach. For CET at CDD, feedback is systematically given and received among a set of regular stakeholders.

Feedback is given from Outreach Workers to project managers through working sessions and Event Report Surveys. In contrast, outreach is longer-term and among a varied set of stakeholders. Outreach is between Outreach Workers and members of their communities, and every Outreach Worker approaches it a little differently. Even within each specific community, groups are diverse and changing. It takes significant time to establish outreach processes and build relationships. The model may need to be used over a longer period before the first impressions of outreach are observable.

VI. Conclusion

This case study set out to document the theory of change behind the CET at CDD model, explore first impressions of the model, and consider its implications for the field of planning. The results of this investigation show that the model is designed to improve access and increase participation of underheard, underserved, and historically excluded communities. The model seeks to do this by employing members of those communities part-time as outreach workers to work between the CDD and the community. Outreach Workers both build trust through outreach and improve internal processes through feedback. Trust is understood to be built through significant investment of time, over a long period, by a trusted community member and by helping people meet their own needs. Investment of time over a long period is also fundamental to the CET at CDD's internal processes, and the team aims to take the time necessary to communicate clearly and effectively. Outreach Workers provide feedback by working with project managers and by completing Event Report Surveys. Additionally, staff training creates a common vocabulary and helps to cultivate an environment where feedback is encouraged. Feedback from Outreach Worker is primarily about communication and understanding across languages and cultures.

Findings suggest that translation, culture, vocabulary, and the quality of speech are fundamental aspects of participatory processes. The results of this study also strengthen scholarship that says planning organizations benefit from working with community leaders to bridge the gap between institution and community (Allen & Slotterback, 2021; Lee, 2019; Umemoto, 2001). This study introduces the idea that helping people meet their needs beyond

the typical purview of planning departments is important to effective engagement. It also reveals that meaningful engagement cannot be rushed.

This study was limited by sample size and it was focused on usefulness to planning organizations rather than to the community. Since the model has been operating for less than a year, this research was meant to document the theory behind it and first impressions. The study offers insight into the CET at CDD model's potential to design engagement for historically excluded communities. Planning organizations could consider it as one tool in a larger community engagement strategy, like the CDD has. It shows promise as a useful tool for planning organizations that want to do a better job communicating across languages and cultures.

VII. Recommendations for Future Research and Inquiry

Further research should be undertaken to go beyond this initial report to evaluate and measure the impact of the initiative on community members' participation in Community Development Department (CDD) projects, programs, and processes. Research could explore how Outreach Worker feedback is incorporated into the CDD's planning processes and decisions. Future studies could look at the relationship between CET at CDD outreach activities and the quality and frequency of engagement by members of the Outreach Workers communities. More research is needed on the experiences of the specific communities that the Outreach Workers represent, across different neighborhoods, across different types of projects, and the relationship between these variables and different engagement strategies. Additionally, research could examine the demographics of CDD planners and consider how those findings could impact the CET at CDD model.

Future research on the CET at CDD model could focus on perspectives that were not captured in this study. This study focused on staff who have been involved with the CET at CDD. Considering staff who have not been involved could provide useful insights. This study also focused on the model's use for the Community Development Department and its implications for planning. More research should be done to determine how members of the community feel they are being engaged in the full range of city departments and services. Research could focus on some or all of the Outreach Workers' communities. Outreach Workers or community organizations could be involved in the study design so that each community is consulted in the ways that are most effective. Beyond the CET at CDD model, additional research is needed to better understand the relationship between language, culture, and meaningful community

engagement. This study begins to address a gap in the literature, but further investigations could benefit underserved communities and the planning organizations that seek to engage them.

VIII. Recommendations for Planning Practice

This study offers insight into the CET at CDD model and language and culture in public participation processes for planning. This information can be used to further develop participatory planning practices in the City of Cambridge, other planning organizations, and in planning school curriculum. Several key recommendations materialized through my research.

Cambridge Community Development Department

- ***Use Event Report Survey data.*** The Event Report Survey results have not yet been incorporated into CDD workflows. The feedback from these surveys may help project managers design more inclusive events. My understanding is that this information has not yet been incorporated because CET at CDD is new and there are time constraints, but it could be beneficial for project managers if it is addressed.
- ***Consider access versus participation.*** Based on the findings of this study, more attention should be paid to the purpose of outreach in the CET at CDD model. There were differences in how people talked about the purpose of Outreach Workers outreach to their communities. Some said the purpose was to increase access while others said it was to increase participation. It is possible that the purpose depends on the specific project, or on other changing factors. Whatever it is, it could be useful for those involved to understand the circumstances in which different approaches are warranted so that they can choose the right approach for their project. Several existing frameworks may help inspire discussion about the purpose of outreach including Quick and Feldman's (2011) inclusion and

participation matrix, the IAP2 (2018) Spectrum of Public Participation, and Fung's (2015) Democracy Cube.

- ***Engage additional communities.*** This investigation revealed that there is interest in expanding the CET at CDD to serve communities beyond those currently represented by Outreach Workers. Suggestions mentioned include youth, older adults, and people with disabilities. Considering how these communities could be engaged through the CET at CDD model could enhance inclusion of the full diversity of the city's constituents. Scholarship shows that plain language improves the engagement of people living with dementia and people with disabilities (Biglieri, 2021). The model may not need much adjustment to serve these additional populations because it emphasizes language practices that make communication easier for everyone, such as plain language.
- ***Meet demand.*** Consider how to meet demand for the support of the CET at CDD. This study found that time is fundamental to the CET at CDD model and that capacity of Outreach Workers is limited. The suggestions offered by Outreach Workers, project managers, and the Community Engagement manager to address demand included employing Outreach Workers full-time and hiring more Outreach Workers.

Other Planning Organizations

- ***Employ cultural translators to support cultural and linguistic differences.*** This is one of the most successful aspects of the CET model. This study found that the CET model may be a good starting point to begin the process of working across cultural and linguistic differences that make communication challenging. Other planning organizations may benefit from

considering which communities in their area are not engaged in planning processes, programs, or projects. Planning organizations could then determine which of those communities are participating at lower rates because of communication challenges. Other municipal departments in and beyond Cambridge might consider whether the CET model is the right fit for their organization. They might look into hiring members of the communities they are trying to reach to serve as cultural translators and liaisons.

- ***Be prepared to help people meet their needs when doing outreach.*** This study found that helping people meet their needs is a critical part of building trust with community members. When staff do outreach, they should anticipate questions about housing and legal services, among other things. This study suggests that it can be beneficial to connect with other departments and learn about local resources. Planning staff do not need to know the answers to questions, but they should know where to redirect people.
- ***Slow down.*** The results of this study show that time is key to trust and communication between an institution and the community. Meaningful engagement takes an investment of time, over a long period of time. Planners looking to lead equitable engagement processes could speak more slowly and think about the pacing of a project.

Field of Planning

- ***Teach communication skills.*** The study shows that communication is an essential part of planning with and for historically excluded populations. This study offers suggestions for city planning programs to make communication with the public a more central part of the curriculum. The results of this study show the value of teaching planners how to use plain

language. These findings suggest that planning school curriculum could use more of a focus on teaching planners how to run a public meeting, to speak clearly, and to talk about their work in a way that the public can understand. The data highlights the importance of learning how to offer translation services and work with language workers. Additional research could be done to determine which skills are most critical.

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