

BEYOND BUSINESS AS USUAL

In partnership with the
Institute for Local
Government

and

The Davenport Institute
for Public Engagement
and Civic Leadership at
Pepperdine University

Sponsored by
The James Irvine
Foundation

Leaders of California's Civic
Organizations Seek New
Ways to Engage the Public
in Local Governance

Beyond Business as Usual: Leaders of California's Civic Organizations Seek New Ways to Engage the Public in Local Governance

A report from Public Agenda by John Immerwahr, Carolin Hagelskamp, Christopher DiStasi and Jeremy Hess

Prepared in partnership with the Institute for Local Government and The Davenport Institute for Public Engagement and Civic Leadership at Pepperdine University

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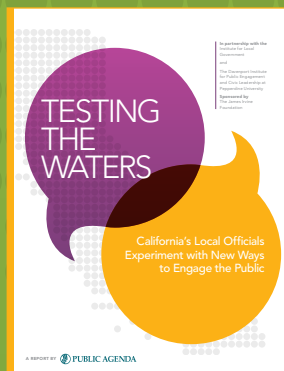
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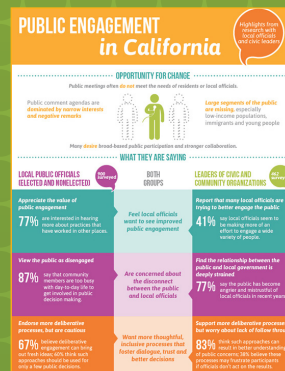
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Public Engagement in California

This report is part of a series that examines the current state of public participation in local government decision making in California. The series also includes:



Testing the Waters
California's Local Officials Experiment with New Ways to Engage the Public



Public Engagement in California
Highlights from research with local officials and civic leaders

BEYOND BUSINESS AS USUAL

Leaders of California’s Civic Organizations
Seek New Ways to Engage the Public
in Local Governance

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What opportunities do Californians have to engage with public issues and influence decisions that affect their lives?

What are ways to strengthen relations between communities and their local governments?

We asked leaders of California's civic and community-based organizations about their views on the state of public participation in local governance. The following report explores what these civic leaders say is working, what's not, and how public engagement can be improved. Traditional models for including the public in local decision making, these leaders say, fail to meet the needs of both residents and local officials. Most see significant value and potential in more inclusive and deliberative forms of engagement, and many agree local officials are making increasing efforts to include residents more meaningfully. Overall, this research suggests civic and community-based organizations are looking for newer and more effective ways to engage the public and may be ready for stronger collaborations with local government.

The report also includes concrete recommendations for local officials and their institutions, civic leaders and their organizations, and foundations and other funders. The recommendations can help improve public engagement in local governance throughout California and, we hope, beyond.

Public Agenda conducted this research in partnership with the Institute of Local Government and The Davenport Institute at Pepperdine University. The work was commissioned by The James Irvine Foundation.

Data for this research was collected through a state-wide, representative survey of 462 leaders of civic and community-based organization that as part of their mission seek to improve local decision making by working with residents and/or local officials on issues that affect their communities ("civic leaders"). The survey was conducted between July 10 and August 22, 2012. Additional data was collected through focus groups and individual interviews with civic leaders across the state.

Six main findings emerged from this research.

1. Many civic leaders feel that the relationship between the public and local government is deeply strained on both sides.

Civic leaders agree that public engagement is not an easy task and concede that the public is often ill informed and too busy with other matters to participate fruitfully in the decision-making process, but they are also troubled by what they see in the actions and attitudes of some local officials.

2. Many civic leaders believe that the traditional formats for addressing public issues do not work.

According to these civic leaders, the typical public hearing format remains an important venue for public participation. And yet the vast majority has reservations about whether these venues successfully serve the needs of either local officials or the public.

3. Most civic leaders say their organization has developed working relationships with local officials that are at least somewhat effective. And a good number agree local officials are trying to better engage the public.

Our survey documents a range of activities—often one-to-one interactions—through which civic and community-based organizations attempt to bridge the gap between community members and local government. For the most part, civic leaders feel their collaborations with local officials have benefited community members and improved decision making. And many say that local officials are making more of an effort to engage the public in decision making.

4. Civic leaders are highly receptive to more deliberative forms of public engagement as a path to improved public engagement. But some worry that such approaches may backfire by first raising and then dashing public expectations.

Although these civic leaders have limited experience collaborating with local officials on public engagement processes that foster dialogue and deliberation among diverse residents, the vast majority see such engagement methods as an intriguing possibility with benefits for both the public decision-making process and community members. Yet, some civic leaders are concerned that local officials won't commit to the process, leaving residents disappointed.

5. Most civic leaders are confident in their capacity to implement a deliberative public engagement strategy.

Few civic leaders seem daunted by the prospect of implementing an effective deliberative public engagement scenario. Even civic leaders who have little experience with this type of engagement are

confident in their organization's ability to implement them. While this finding is encouraging, it also raises the question of whether civic leaders underestimate the challenges of a fully inclusive and meaningful engagement approach.

6. Some regional differences: Civic leaders from nonurban Northern California are comparatively less equipped to collaborate with local officials on more inclusive public engagement efforts.

In addition, this survey found that urban civic leaders are most likely to lament a lack of opportunities for the public to effectively participate in local government.

Special Focus: Public engagement in disenfranchised communities

To better understand the extent to which public engagement efforts in California are inclusive of and responsive to all sectors of the public, we sought to learn more about the views of civic leaders whose organizations primarily serve traditionally disenfranchised communities, especially low-income, immigrant and ethnic minority populations, through in-depth interviews.

These leaders expressed even greater frustration with the status quo than other civic leaders statewide. They are more frustrated by the existing process and more critical of local officials. At the same time, our interviewees stressed that they see their organizations as necessary partners with both the public and officials: They develop community knowledge and trust, bring diverse groups of residents to the table and offer officials structured opportunities to access these resources. To overcome the obstacles they face in their public engagement efforts, these organizations work specifically on building personal and one-to-one connections, both with local officials and with their own communities. Despite challenges, many of our interviewees feel that compared with just a few years ago, public engagement in California has improved. They attribute most of the progress to the increasingly sophisticated work of organizations like theirs, which are becoming established and respected actors in the civic arena.

Recommendations for supporting more effective and inclusive public engagement

Based on this research, as well as its companion study with California's local officials and decades of experience supporting sound public engagement, Public Agenda proposes a number of recommendations for local officials and civic and community-based organizations who seek to improve the public decision-making process by including broad cross sections of the public in meaningful deliberations, as well as for foundations and other supporters interested in funding these efforts. These are the main ideas in brief:

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR STRONGER PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Local officials and their institutions can gain from:

- Partnering with community-based organizations
- Hiring and training staff to increase public engagement skills
- Networking with colleagues who have effective practices
- Evaluating local efforts



Civic leaders and their organizations can gain from:

- Partnering with local officials
- Hiring and training staff to increase public engagement skills
- Networking and sharing resources with other organizations
- Evaluating local efforts



Funders can make a difference by supporting:

- Partnerships between public officials and local organizations
- Trainings and technical assistance
- Experiments, including use of online engagement tools
- Research, evaluation and knowledge sharing



For more information on this study and its companion study with California's local public officials, visit: <http://www.publicagenda.org/pages/public-engagement-in-california>

INTRODUCTION

What opportunities do Californians have to engage with public issues and influence decisions that affect their lives?

What stands in the way of productive dialogues between local officials and the residents they serve?

What are the possible ways to strengthen relations between local government and the publics they serve?

To provide some answers to these questions, we conducted a research study that sought the opinions of more than 900 local officials and 500 leaders of civic and community-based organizations in California. We asked these local officials and civic leaders about their efforts to engage the public in decision making, their experiences with traditional public hearings at council and commission meetings and their interests and attitudes toward newer forms of public engagement—especially methods that seek to give broad cross sections of the public the opportunity to deliberate over local issues and weigh the trade-offs of policy decisions that affect their lives.

The perspective of civic leaders and their organizations

This report—the second of two summarizing this research—presents what we learned from surveying and interviewing leaders from civic and community-based organizations across California. We reached out to leaders of organizations that as part of their missions seek to improve local decision making by working with residents and/or local officials on issues that affect their communities. Often functioning as intermediaries between community members and local government, leaders of these organizations have a unique view on the current state of public participation in local decision making. We asked them about their experiences engaging with local officials, their views on traditional public meetings and their experiences with newer forms of public engagement—especially methods that seek to give broad cross sections of the public the opportunity to deliberate over local issues and weigh the trade-offs of policy decisions that affect their lives. Moreover,

we sought to assess the prospects of and barriers to including broader cross sections of the public in decision making in meaningful ways by means of effective collaborations between community-based organizations and local officials.

More than 500 leaders of civic and community-based organizations participated in this research. Most of these leaders (N=462) responded to a statewide survey, which was fielded between July 10 and August 22, 2012, by telephone and on the web. The survey was preceded by three focus groups and 14 individual interviews with civic leaders. Moreover, we conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with heads of organizations that work predominantly with traditionally disenfranchised communities, including low-income, ethnic minority and immigrant populations. Page seven summarizes key characteristics of the survey respondents, and the Methodology section at the end of this report provides a detailed description of the study design, participating civic leaders and the data analysis process.

This report is divided into two parts. We first present the findings from our statewide survey of 462 leaders of civic and community-based organizations. These findings complement those from our research on California's local officials' attitudes, experiences and concerns regarding the state of public participation in local government decision making, experiences and concerns of local city and county officials regarding the state of public participation in local government decision making.¹ The current report compares and contrasts the views of California's civic leaders to those of the state's local officials whenever such comparisons illuminate potential opportunities or specific challenges to meaningful public engagement efforts. Throughout, we augment our survey findings with illustrative quotes from the focus groups and interviews with leaders of civic and community-based organizations in California that were conducted in preparation for the survey study.

The second part of this report zeros in on the views of leaders from 20 community-based organizations that work predominantly with traditionally disenfranchised communities, including low-income, ethnic minority and immigrant populations. We summarize what we heard in in-depth interviews with these leaders, who are particularly concerned with increasing meaningful participation among underrepresented groups in government decision making. In addition, we outline how these leaders' views differ from those of other civic leaders in the survey.

Finally, we discuss a number of important practical recommendations that emerge from this research and its companion study on local officials.

Companion study: Local public officials' perspective

Results from our parallel study with elected and nonelected local public officials are detailed in a separate report, "Testing the Waters: California's Local Officials Experiment with New Ways to Engage the Public." Both reports conclude with recommendations for future action and research that draw on insights gained from our work with civic leaders and local officials.

¹Carolyn Hagelskamp, John Immerwahr and Jeremy Hess, "Testing the Waters: California's Local Officials Experiment with New Ways to Engage the Public" (New York: Public Agenda, 2013).

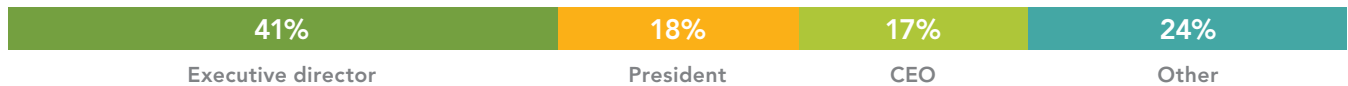
Characteristics of the Survey Sample

462 leaders of civic and community-based organizations across California (“civic leaders”) participated in this survey.

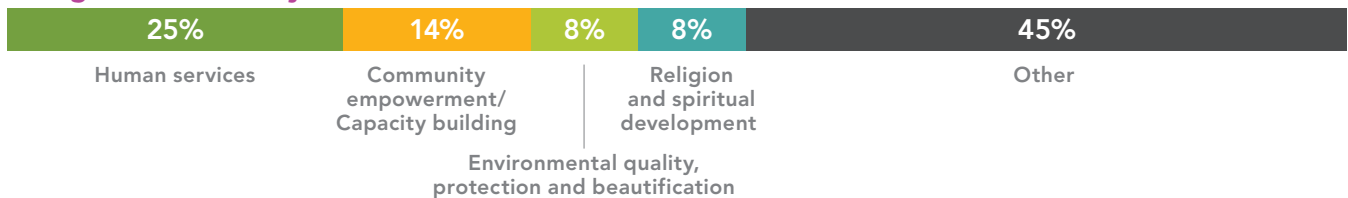
To qualify, leaders had to indicate that their organization seeks to improve local government decision making by working with residents and/or local officials on issues that affect their communities. The survey was fielded from July 10 to August 22, 2012.

These tables summarize characteristics of participating civic leaders and their organizations.

Positions



Categories of Activity²



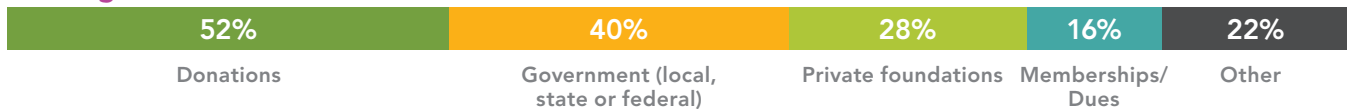
Communities Served³



Urbanicity



Funding Sources⁴



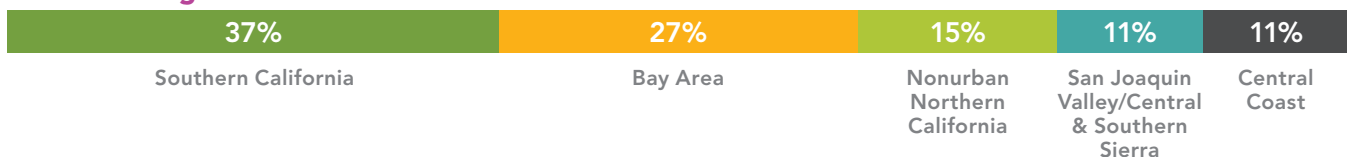
Age of Organization



Number of Employees



California Regions



²These categories are given by the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities and describe 501(c)3 organizations' main areas of interest and activity.

³Respondents could list more than one community they served. Percentages therefore add up to more than 100.

⁴Respondents could check as many funding sources as applied. Percentages therefore add up to more than 100.



MAIN FINDINGS

1

Many civic leaders feel that the relationship between the public and local government is deeply strained on both sides.



From the perspective of civic leaders, public engagement is not an easy task.

It involves not only goodwill and receptiveness from local officials but also skills, commitment, knowledge and time on the part of the public. Leaders concede that the general public is often preoccupied, poorly informed and increasingly angry about or mistrustful of the decision-making process on issues that face their communities. In this regard their views are very similar to what we found among California's local officials.

85% believe that most **residents are too busy** with day-to-day life to actively become involved in public decision making.

77% say the **public has become angrier and mistrustful** of local officials in recent years.

63% believe most **residents don't keep abreast of issues** that affect the well-being of their community.

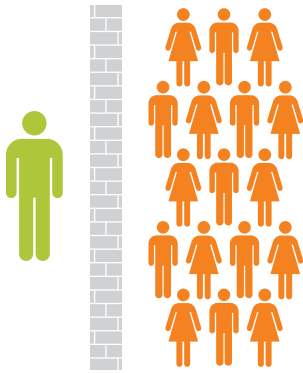
In our companion study, local officials responded very similarly to these questions. Nearly all say that community members are too busy with day-to-day life to get involved in public decision making (87 percent), and that most community members do not keep abreast of the issues that affect their community's well-being (72 percent). Local officials, too, overwhelmingly believe that community members have become much angrier with and mistrustful of local officials in recent years (69 percent).

Recent public opinion polling suggests both civic leaders and public officials may be overly pessimistic about the public's mistrust. A September 2012 Gallup poll⁵ found that public trust in local officials nationwide is higher than for most other officials (74 percent expressed a great deal or fair amount of trust in local government versus 65 percent in state government), and that it has only increased in recent years. And the Public Policy Institute of California reports, based on a 2012 survey of state residents, that "Californians express more confidence in local than state government and wish to see even more authority shifted to the local level."⁶

⁵Jeff Jones and Lydia Saad, "In U.S., Trust in State, Local Governments Up," Gallup, September 26, 2012, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/157700/trust-state-local-governments.aspx>.

⁶Mark Baldassare, "Improving California's Democracy" (San Francisco: Public Policy Institute of California, 2012), http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/atissue/AI_1012MBAI.pdf.

But many civic leaders also believe that local officials are part of the problem rather than part of the solution. They see local official leadership as isolated and overly concerned with winning publicity and support from the most politically powerful groups.



The vast majority (71 percent) of civic leaders say that **local officials often become isolated** from the residents they serve, and that they make decisions on political grounds rather than in the public interest:

75% believe local officials only pay attention to the most powerful interest groups.

71% say local officials only attend community events if they think they'll get positive publicity.

70% say local officials are too quick to do what is popular instead of what is right.

From the perspective of civic leaders, there is no consensus on a single main cause of the breakdown in communication between local government and the public it serves. Nearly all civic leaders think that the interests of their group are not “well considered” in local government decision making, and see a number of reasons why this is the case. Some see the main problem as a lack of knowledge and motivation on the part of their own members. Others believe that their members are disengaged not so much because of lack of motivation but because they no longer trust local officials. Others blame a lack of opportunities for the members to make themselves heard.

Oftentimes elected officials hate going into a debate-like setting, because they expect it's going to be a lot of yelling and screaming.

— L.A. CIVIC LEADER

In focus groups and interviews, civic leaders also acknowledge that local officials work in a system that disincentivizes extensive public engagement efforts, or may have had experiences that deter them from engaging with communities and organizations that are particularly antagonistic.

Civic leaders are nearly split on whether **community members have ample opportunity to participate in local government decision making.**



Full survey results can be found at the end of this report.

I do not see our clients go into a town hall meeting. It's almost too overwhelming and intimidating for them.

— FRESNO CIVIC LEADER

When asked specifically about their organizations' members and clients, civic leaders felt that their interests are not well considered in local government decision making (only 11 percent said they are well considered).

Civic leaders also split on the main reason that their members' or clients' interests are not well considered in local government decision making.

Percent of civic leaders who say:



⁷Percentages in this graph reflect combined answers to questions 9 and 10.

2

Many civic leaders believe that the traditional formats for addressing public issues do not work.



Many civic leaders have reservations about how effective the standard public hearings and comments really are.

About half of those who have experience with public hearings and comments don't think that these meetings improve communication between local officials and the public. In these leaders' views, typical public hearings neither help the public better understand issues nor help leaders get a better understanding of the public's concerns. Local officials, we found, share some of the same concerns about the quality of their typical public meetings, but civic leaders are often more critical.

66% say typical public hearings often lead to gripe sessions.⁸

57% don't think typical public hearings are effective in explaining issues to the public.

54% don't think typical public hearings generate meaningful discussions among ordinary residents.

54% say typical public hearings exclude broad sections of the public.

53% don't think typical public hearings give officials a solid understanding of the public's concerns and preferences.

Our companion study shows that even though most local officials view traditional meetings as effective means to communicate with the public, many also agree with civic leaders that these meetings typically lead to gripe sessions (50 percent) and often don't generate thoughtful discussion among ordinary residents (50 percent). In fact, most local officials (64 percent) say their typical meetings attract complainers and "professional citizens" and do not give voice to the real public.

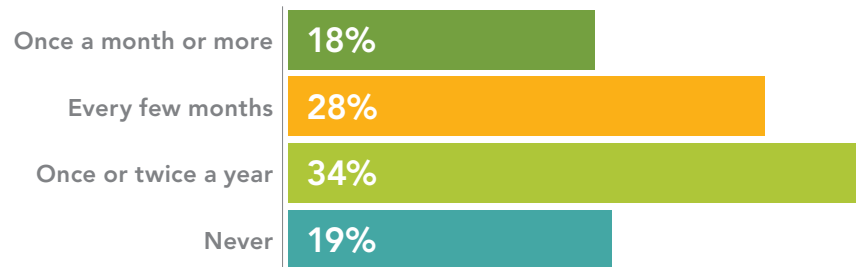
⁸Percentages in this section describe response patterns among civic leaders who attended at least one public hearing or comment in the past 12 months and believed they knew enough about these meetings to evaluate them on the questions asked—about 72 percent of the total sample.

68% say that public hearings and meetings are an important venue for representing their group's interests.

Yet the vast majority of civic leaders attend public hearings, and most say these meetings are an important venue for advancing the interests of their organizations.

Eighty percent of civic leaders attended at least one or two public hearings or comments at council, board or commission meetings in the past twelve months. Many attend more frequently.

Percent of civic leaders who say they **attend public hearings**:



Who, exactly, constitutes a powerful interest group in the eyes of civic leaders?

And whom are local officials thinking about when they say meetings are typically dominated by people with narrow agendas?

What, exactly, do officials and civic leaders believe it takes to be well considered in the public decision-making process?

Taken together, our two surveys of civic leaders and local officials suggest an unproductive dynamic may be developing in which each community group struggles to dominate the conversation while officials pay less attention overall.

Civic leaders believe that only the most powerful groups receive adequate public attention from local officials, and that the interests of citizens who are not represented by a group are often ignored. Despite their grievances, however, most civic leaders consider traditional public forums as important venues for them to represent the interests of their members and organization.

From the perspective of local officials, one of the biggest problems is that typical public hearings are dominated by groups with special interests and narrow agendas and by professional citizens and “complainers.” Most officials don’t think public hearings give voice to the real public.

These are significant differences in perspective—evoking the image of a public meeting where citizen groups keep shouting louder while officials are covering their ears—and they clearly require some further inspection.

According to civic leaders, the public decision-making process only rewards the most powerful groups:

82% say residents who don’t belong to an organized group that can mobilize them are often left out of public decision making.

75% say local officials only pay attention to powerful interest groups.

YET:

68% say that public hearings and meetings are important venues for representing the interests of their organization and its members and clients.

At the same time, local officials are troubled by the particular strength of groups with a specific interest:

76% say public meetings are typically dominated by people with narrow agendas.

64% say public hearings attract complainers and professional citizens—they don’t give voice to the real public.

3

Most civic leaders say their organization has developed working relationships with local officials that are at least somewhat effective. And a good number agree local officials are trying to better engage the public.

The most common goal of the civic and community-based organizations that we surveyed is to get their message directly to the public by raising awareness of issues that affect the community.

But in addition to that strategy, many of these organizations rely on building various one-on-one relationships with officials by joining commissions or inviting officials to meet directly with community members, among other things.

Only four in 10 civic leaders say that they collaborate with local officials specifically to design and cosponsor activities that would encourage broad-based public participation and engagement. And comparatively few organizations focus their resources on large-scale engagement efforts, such as urging broad-based participation in public hearings or organizing public events such as rallies.

Percent of civic leaders who say their organizations do each of the following either regularly, occasionally, or rarely or never:

	Regularly— main function %	Occasionally— we do it as needed %	Rarely or never %
Get the word out on public issues that affect your members or clients.	31	50	18
Invite local officials to events where they would meet your organization's members or clients.	31	45	23
Advocate for public policies that will benefit your members or clients.	29	40	30
Join commissions, advisory committees or task forces to advise local officials about your members' or clients' concerns.	23	37	39
Facilitate community conversations where your members or clients, other community residents and local officials discuss solutions to issues.	15	43	41
Collaborate with local officials to design or cosponsor activities that encourage public participation in local government decision making.	11	33	57
Work to ensure a large and broadly representative turnout at public meetings with local officials.	9	32	59
Conduct surveys and needs assessments to inform local government policy decisions.	5	29	66
Organize events such as rallies, protests or in-person visits to local officials' offices.	8	21	70

The majority of civic leaders say that officials are at least somewhat responsive to their requests.

As one might expect, organizations that receive government funding are most likely to report that officials are responsive to them, but those that have been established for a longer period are also more likely than somewhat younger organizations to find local government responsive.



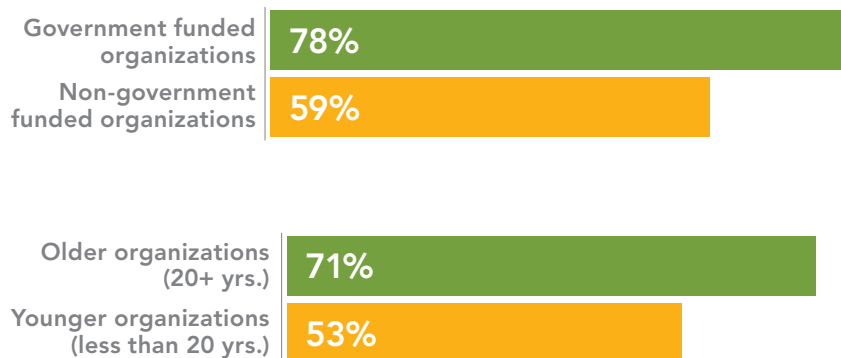
Among those how invite local officials to meet with their members and clients:

62% say that local officials are at least somewhat responsive to requests from their organization.

63% say those officials typically attend.

Government-funded and long-established organizations are most likely to say **local government is responsive** to their requests.

Percent of civic leader who say **local government is responsive** to their organizations' requests:



A significant number of civic leaders feel that more local officials are, in fact, seeking ways to improve public participation.

41% say local officials seem to be making more of an effort to engage a wide variety of people in public decision making.

Most civic leaders have worked with local officials in some capacity in the past 12 months, and for the most part report positive outcomes from these collaborations—including the potential to build up community trust and to improve public decision making.

80% of civic leaders say their organization **worked with a local official in some capacity** in the past 12 months.

And among these:

61% say working with a local official **helped them achieve their organization's goals**.

61% say working with a local official was **effective in building community trust**.

50% say that their collaborations with officials **helped improve local government decision making**.

Given that not all collaborations have the goal of directly improving decision making, these findings are noteworthy and encouraging. In fact, of those who say that “increasing public participation in government decision making” is a major goal of their organization (as opposed to a minor goal or not a goal), 60 percent believe that collaborations have led to better decision making. Sixty-eight percent of advocacy organizations also say this.



Many civic leaders also report specific problems with their collaborations with local officials—problems that could undermine the potential benefits of their collaborations.

Of those who collaborated with local officials:

32% say the process **required too much time and resources**.

33% say local **officials used the collaboration mainly for publicity** rather than out of concern for the community.

39% say local officials wanted to **maintain too much control**.

60% experienced at least one of the preceding drawbacks.



4

Civic leaders are highly receptive to more deliberative forms of public engagement as a path to improved public engagement. But some worry that such approaches may backfire by first raising and then dashing public expectations.

The specific deliberative engagement scenario includes these elements:

- Local officials and civic leaders bring together a large and diverse group of residents who meet for several hours to discuss a public issue facing the community.
- Participants break into small discussion groups with a variety of people and perspectives.
- Sessions are led by a facilitator.
- The ideas and preferences emerging from public deliberation are shared with all other participants and the broader community
- Suggestions for actions emerging from public deliberation are presented to appropriate local officials.

Deliberative public engagement

We sought to gauge civic leaders' views on and experience with nontraditional and more deliberative forms of public engagement.^{9,10} The goal of deliberative public engagement approaches is typically to break down exactly those barriers that many civic leaders and local officials agree are hindering productive, broad-based and civil public participation in government decision making. Specifically, it seeks to combat a lack of understanding and public trust, to attract more people to public meetings and to help counter the domination of the loudest voices.

Rather than merely presenting the public with additional information, deliberative strategies are predicated on the idea that one must also help people understand the choices that the community faces in addressing a public problem, including the values underlying those choices and the likely consequences of different solutions. And it involves the use of well-designed ways for people to work through those choices and their pros and cons.



Instead of asking civic leaders about deliberative public engagement in conceptual terms, we probed their attitudes by presenting a specific scenario that entailed some key deliberative features. This scenario is meant not to be prescriptive but only to serve as an example of what a deliberative process may look like, and hence elicit civic leaders' views on such approaches in general.

We also used this scenario to probe the attitudes of the local officials we surveyed in our companion study.

⁹For more information on these approaches to public engagement, see, for example, "Golden Governance: Building Effective Public Engagement in California" (Davenport Institute, 2011), <http://nccoc.net/GoldenGovernance>, or "Principles of Local Government Public Engagement" (Institute for Local Government), <http://www.ca-ilg.org/PublicEngagementPrinciples>.

¹⁰For some of Public Agenda's own work on deliberative public engagement, see the "Related Publications" section of this report on page 59, or see Daniel Yankelovich and Will Friedman, eds., *Toward Wiser Public Judgment* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2010).

Many of the civic leaders are interested in new forms of public engagement and have had some experience with them.

When presented with the specific example of a deliberative public engagement process:



43% say that they have **already participated in a deliberative public engagement process** like this.

89% of those who have participated say it's likely they will do so again.

70% of those who have not yet experienced deliberative public engagement say that they would be interested in collaborating with local officials on such a process in the future.

65% believe that a deliberative engagement process would benefit their organization and its members or clients.

Most civic leaders believe that deliberative forms of public engagement can improve relations between local government and the public. Fewer (yet still most) are sure such a deliberative approach can improve public decisions. We found that local officials, too, for the most part saw significant benefits in these forms of public engagement, but the civic leaders are even more likely to see benefits than local officials.

The vast majority of civic leaders believe that a number of positive outcomes would likely occur if their members or clients were to participate in a deliberative public engagement process:



**DELIBERATIVE
PUBLIC
ENGAGEMENT**



better understanding of public concerns (83% agree).¹¹

fresh ideas and solutions (77% agree).

public gains skills in political participation (72% agree).

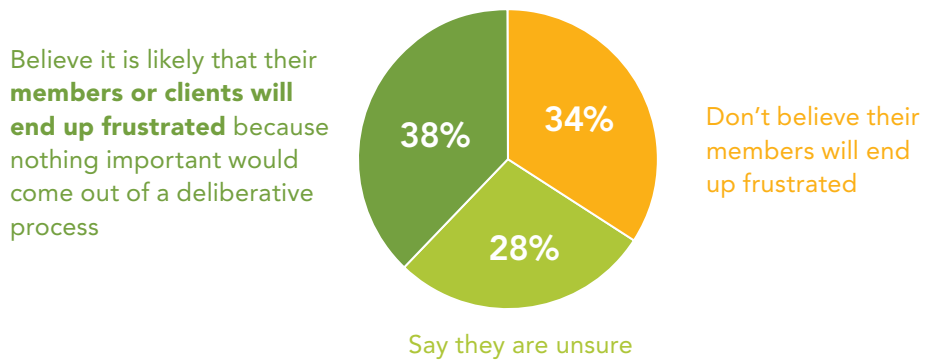
more sound public decisions (67% agree).

¹¹ Between 10 percent and 22 percent of civic leaders responded "Don't know" to each item.

In our companion study, the majority of local officials, too, believe that community preferences and concerns could be better understood through a deliberative public engagement process (77 percent) and that fresh ideas would be heard (67 percent). However, local officials are more skeptical than civic leaders about whether deliberative engagement approaches can improve public decision making: Just 42 percent think so. An important question to explore further is what, exactly, civic leaders and public officials believe constitutes a “more sound” or “better” public decision.

But will it backfire? Although civic leaders are intrigued by deliberative engagement methods, one big question lingers in their thinking: Will officials be sufficiently committed to the process to follow up on the public input they’ve received? Trying a new process is a risky venture, since failure can even further dash the hopes of those who participate. Only one in three are confident that this won’t happen; the rest are far less confident.

Percent of civic leaders who:



Full survey results can be found at the end of this report.

5

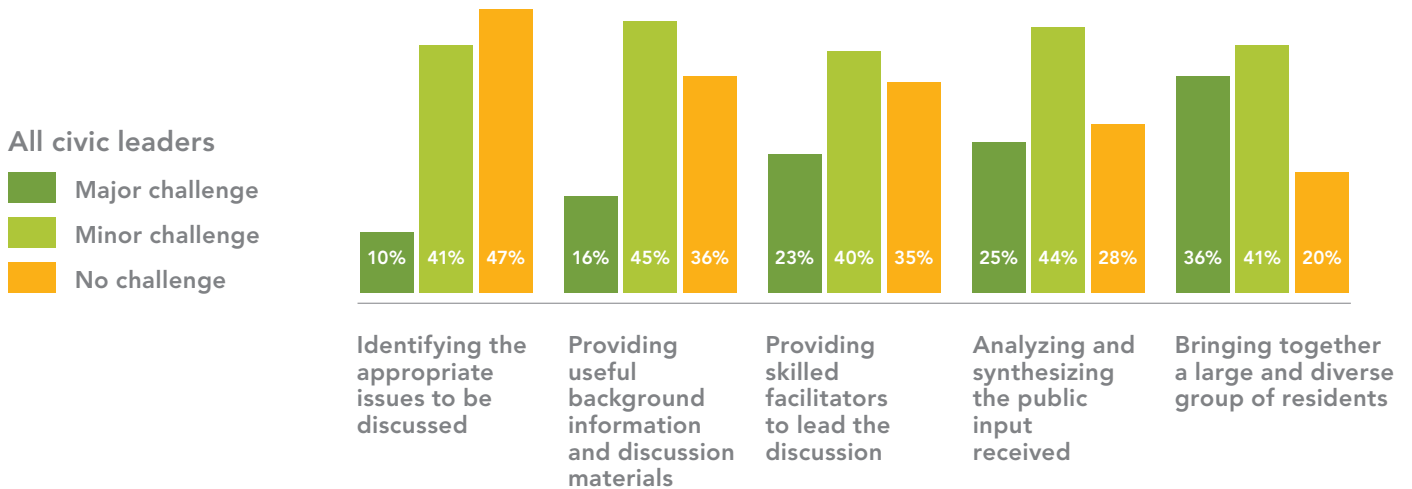
Most civic leaders are confident in their capacity to implement a deliberative public engagement strategy.

Civic leaders are undaunted by most potential challenges of implementing a deliberative public engagement process. The main obstacle that they see is a lack of resources and staff, not a lack of skills or expertise. Again, there is a similarity between the views of civic leaders and those of local officials.

71% believe their organization is **at least somewhat capable** of implementing a deliberative engagement process; **34%** say it is **very capable**.

Few civic leaders perceive major challenges to implementing a deliberative public engagement process.

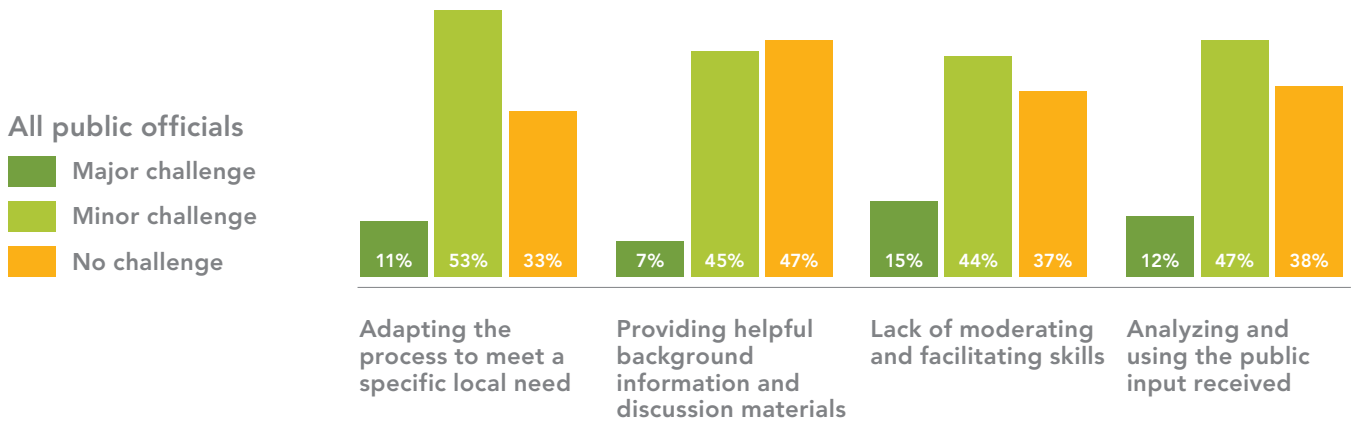
Percent of civic leaders who say the following are either a major, a minor or no challenge:



83% of civic leaders think that if the challenges above arose, it would be because of a **shortage in the necessary resources and staff**. Only **29%** think they may **lack the expertise**.

In our companion study of local officials, we found even fewer who are seriously concerned about the challenges of a deliberative engagement approach.

Percent of local officials who say the following are either a major, a minor or no challenge:



Only 23 percent of local officials believe they lack the skills and expertise to conduct a deliberative engagement process.

One somewhat surprising finding, at least to us, is that civic leaders who have little actual experience with deliberative public engagement protocols say that they are ready to carry out these processes themselves. Based on our own, long-time experience in public engagement, we believe this finding suggests that many civic leaders may be somewhat overconfident in their ability to implement these strategies.

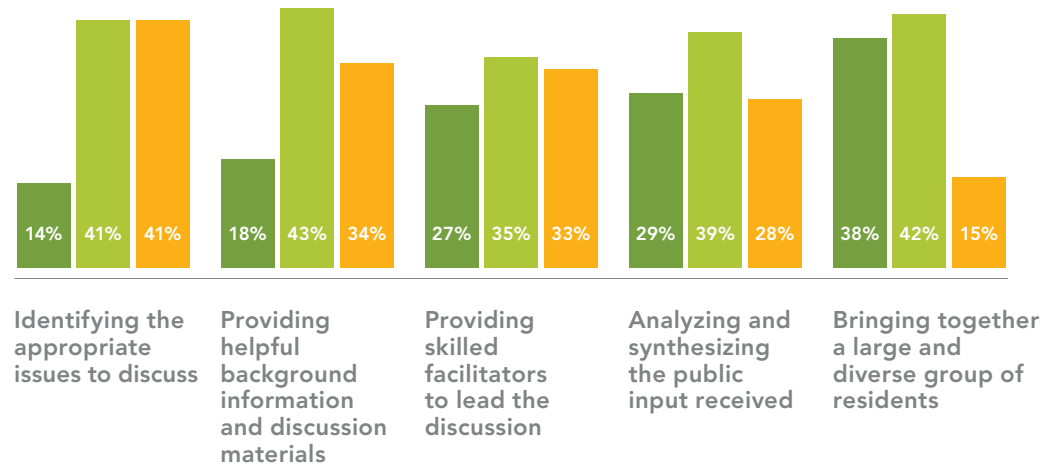
Half (51 percent) of the civic leaders say that their organization has not been involved in a comprehensive public engagement process similar to the example we provided.

Nevertheless, these leaders, too, show fairly high levels of confidence that they can implement such a process.

Percent of civic leaders who say the following are either a major, a minor or no challenge:

Civic leaders who have little experience with deliberative engagement processes

- Major Challenge
- Minor Challenge
- No Challenge



We found an identical pattern among the local officials in our companion study. Even those with little experience expressed minimal concern about potential challenges.

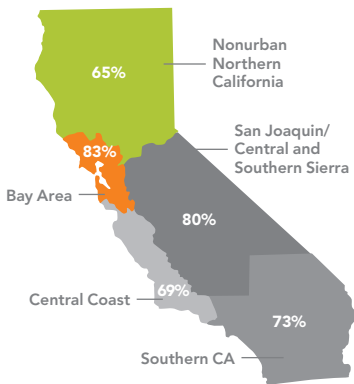
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Some regional differences: Civic leaders from nonurban Northern California are comparatively less equipped to collaborate with local officials on more inclusive public engagement efforts.

Overall, this survey revealed many similarities in the attitudes, experiences and views of civic leaders across different regions and diverse communities across the state. Yet, a few notable differences emerged that point to some geographic variation in residents' opportunities to participate in local government decisions.

Civic leaders from nonurban Northern California report comparatively less experience collaborating with local officials, while officials from the Bay Area report the most.

Percent of civic leaders who say they **have collaborated with the local officials** to design and cosponsor activities that encourage public participation in local government decision making:¹²



65% in nonurban Northern California

69% in the Central Coast

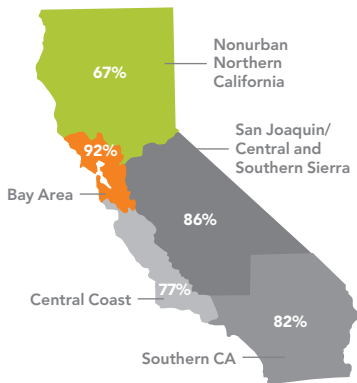
73% in Southern California

80% in the San Joaquin/Central and Southern Sierra

83% in the Bay Area

¹²The difference in percentages between civic leaders from nonurban Northern California and the Bay Area are statistically significant. Differences between leaders from nonurban Northern California and the other three regions are not large enough to reach statistical significance, given the small number of respondents within each group.

Percent of civic leaders who say they **have facilitated events** in which community members and local officials discuss solutions to issues together:¹³



67% in nonurban Northern California

77% in the Central Coast

82% in Southern California

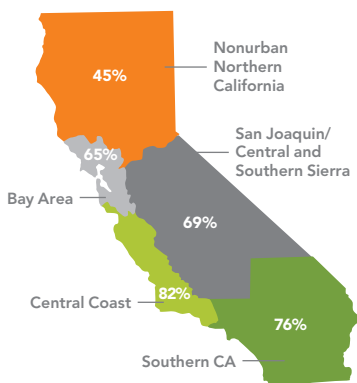
86% in the San Joaquin/Central and Southern Sierra

92% in the Bay Area

44% of civic leaders from **nonurban Northern California** say that **local officials do not usually attend events** when they invite them, just 24% of civic leaders in the Bay Area say that.

At the same time, civic leaders from nonurban Northern California who have never collaborated with local officials on a deliberative public engagement event are less interested in doing so in the future than their counterparts in other California regions. And overall, civic leaders from nonurban Northern California are least likely to view their organization as capable of implementing a deliberative process.

Percent of civic leaders who have never collaborated with local officials on a deliberative public engagement event that are at least somewhat interested in their organization collaborating on such an event with local officials:¹⁴



45% in nonurban Northern California

65% in the Bay Area

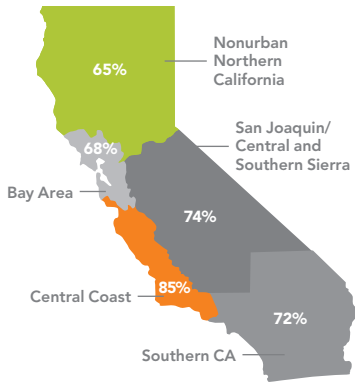
69% in the San Joaquin/Central and Southern Sierra

76% in Southern California

82% at the Central Coast

¹³The difference in percentages between civic leaders from nonurban Northern California and the Bay Area are statistically significant. Differences between leaders from nonurban Northern California and the other three regions are not large enough to reach statistical significance, given the small number of respondents within each group.

¹⁴The differences in percentages between civic leaders from nonurban Northern California and Southern California, and between leaders from nonurban Northern California and the Central Coast, are statistically significant. Differences between leaders from nonurban Northern California and the other two regions are not large enough to reach statistical significance, given the small number of respondents within each group.



Percent of all civic leaders who find their organization at least somewhat capable of implementing a deliberative public engagement process:¹⁵

65% in nonurban Northern California

68% in the Bay Area

74% in the San Joaquin/Central and Southern Sierra

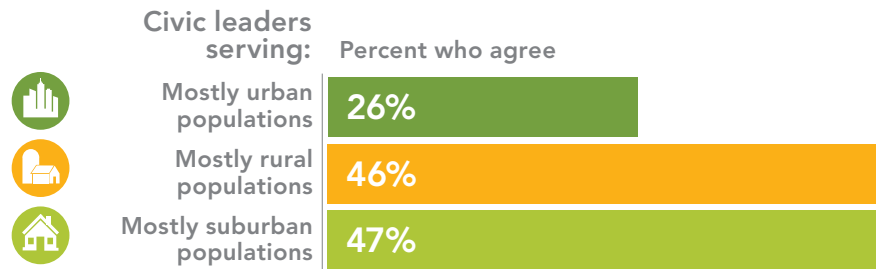
72% in Southern California

85% at the Central Coast

Civic leaders who serve urban populations are most likely to say that opportunities for the public to participate are inadequate.

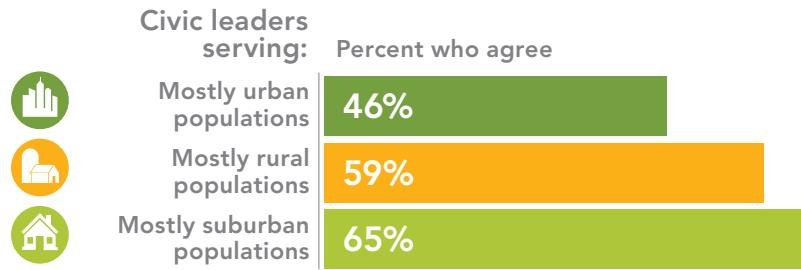
Our survey revealed that civic leaders from urban areas are most likely to lament a lack of opportunities for residents to participate in local government decision making, and they are most likely to emphasize that residents not belonging to an organization are left out of the decision-making process.

Typical public forums are effective in explaining issues to ordinary residents.

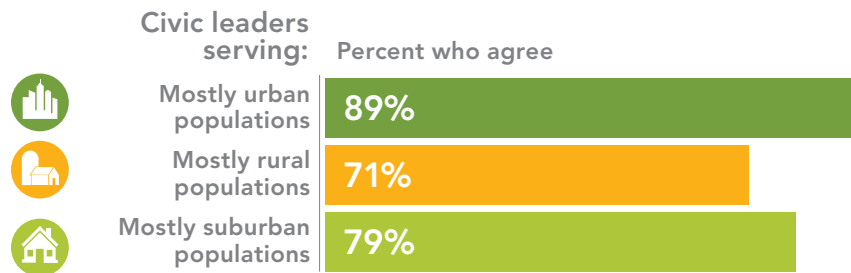


¹⁵The difference in percentages between civic leaders from nonurban Northern California and the Central Coast are statistically significant. Differences between leaders from nonurban Northern California and the other three regions are not large enough to reach statistical significance, given the small number of respondents within each group.

Residents have ample opportunity to engage in local government decision making.¹⁶



Residents who do not belong to an organized group that can mobilize them are often left out of public decision making.¹⁷



¹⁶The difference in percentages between urban and rural leaders on this question is not statistically significant.

¹⁷The difference in percentages between urban and suburban leaders on this question is not statistically significant.

SPECIAL FOCUS:

Public engagement in disenfranchised communities

What we heard from civic leaders who work with low-income, ethnic minority and immigrant populations about the state of public participation in local government decision making



For public engagement to be functional, effective and just, it needs to be inclusive of all sectors of the public. It must be receptive to potentially conflicting inputs and responsive to the needs of diverse residents. To better understand the extent to which local officials' public engagement efforts in California are inclusive and responsive, we looked at the experiences of civic leaders whose organizations primarily serve traditionally disenfranchised communities, especially low-income, immigrant and ethnic minority populations. First, we compared this group's survey responses with the responses of civic leaders who do not work primarily with these groups. Next, we conducted in-depth interviews with leaders of 20 organizations that have significant experience engaging low-income, immigrant and ethnic minority communities and that have been particularly successful in increasing their opportunities for meaningful participation in government decision making.¹⁸ We wanted to know:

- How do these community leaders evaluate officials' approaches to public engagement?
- What do these leaders say are the building blocks of sustained, inclusive public engagement?
- What challenges do these leaders believe stand in the way of more deliberative, inclusive and meaningful public engagement?
- What changes have these leaders seen over the years, and where do they believe public engagement in California is headed?

It is important to note that most of the research presented in this special focus section is qualitative and captures the views and experiences of leaders from only 20 organizations. Thus we cannot generalize most of these findings to all California civic leaders whose organizations represent disenfranchised communities; nevertheless, we believe these themes provide some uniquely rich and informative insights into the state of public participation in local government decision making in California's underrepresented communities.

The concerns and criticisms that civic leaders expressed in the survey are significantly more pronounced among the subgroup of leaders who work with traditionally disenfranchised communities.

Survey respondents whose organizations serve mainly immigrant communities, low-income populations or racial/ethnic minorities are consistently more frustrated with their local officials' engagement efforts than leaders of other organizations. The vast majority believe that local officials only pay attention to powerful interest groups (85 percent versus 71 percent), are isolated from the communities they serve (81 percent versus 67 percent) and attend meetings only when they provide positive publicity (83 percent versus 68 percent). More than half of these civic leaders feel that their clients and members are not considered in local government decision making (54 percent versus 43 percent). This group of civic leaders is also more likely to say traditional public hearings are largely ineffective

¹⁸All interviewees were top administrators from organizations that had received funding from The James Irvine Foundation in 2011 and/or 2012. All organizations qualified for our statewide survey of civic leaders. They were located in a variety of cities and towns across California, including both urban and rural settings.

means for explaining issues to ordinary residents (68 percent versus 50 percent).

Our interviewees echoed these sentiments. Though nearly every interviewee could name an exceptionally responsive and committed official, their general opinions about officials' independent efforts to engage the public broadly are negative. In their view, officials' efforts are too often self-serving and risk-averse, and involve only the most powerful interests. Most officials, they said, have little knowledge of or interest in more robust forms of public engagement. All too often these leaders told us they struggle against officials who are unresponsive, intransigent or antagonistic toward greater public participation.

The spirit is, "It's mandatory," as opposed to, "We really welcome public participation."

They believe that the people that we're working with aren't really the important people. They're not in their social setting. They've never met the families that we're talking about. They've never been to that neighborhood. Their reality is a total different reality from the rest of the community. They have no interest in delving into that.

Civic leaders added that organized venues for public participation in government decision making that are designed to be more inclusive (e.g. local planning committees or neighborhood councils) often lack sufficient government resources and clout to be impactful. One problem, leaders feel, is that government doesn't provide training for the citizen-leaders of these groups.

Nonetheless, most civic leaders could name a few exceptional examples of officials whose work shows a commitment to inclusive public engagement and whose successes prove government can engage with the public effectively. One leader reported, "There's a crew of elected officials that came out of organizing or activism that definitely believe and embrace the idea of civic engagement." Civic leaders indicated that these officials are not consistently elected or nonelected, executive or legislative, city or county;

however, positive stories were more common among urban civic leaders.

In light of these civic leaders' experiences with governments that fail to engage all sectors of the public, they argue that the investments their organizations make toward ensuring broad-based participation constitute an essential part of the civic infrastructure.

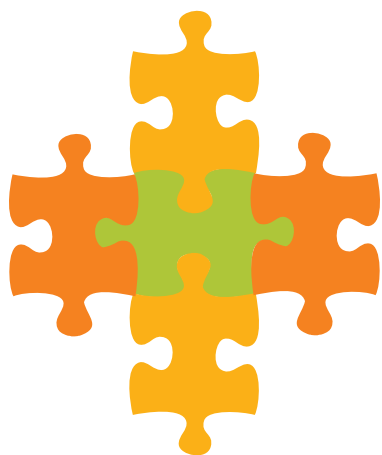
In our survey, we found that nearly all respondents whose organizations serve mainly immigrant communities, low-income populations or racial/ethnic minorities think that residents who do not belong to an organized group are typically left out of the decision-making process (95 percent versus 78 percent). Our interviewees agreed but made the case that their organizations are critical for maintaining effective local democratic processes.

These civic leaders argued that organizations like theirs provide access, knowledge, momentum and voice to communities who may not know how to become engaged or are currently left out of decision-making processes. Moreover, many interviewees see their organizations as necessarily partnered with both the public and officials: They develop community knowledge and trust, bring diverse groups of people to the table and offer the public and officials structured opportunities to access each other's resources. In so doing, they endeavor to hold local officials accountable—to a degree that individual community members typically cannot—and ensure that public engagement with officials is always fair and inclusive, and has actual consequences.

The people we work with are just not taken into account when local government does its work. But if we've organized a neighborhood and we've engaged the decision makers before the conversation starts and we lay the ground rules for how the conversation is going to occur, then we don't have that problem. Our job is to make sure that doesn't happen, so where we're involved, our people are taken into account.

If we invite officials to an informational meeting, they know that it's not a one-shot deal. We're going to follow up. There's some kind of accountability. That's really key both to ensure that people will participate and to get real buy-in from the electeds.

Ultimately, most of these civic leaders believe their organizations serve functions that government should serve, such as providing robust organizing efforts prior to engagement initiatives or strong civic education to involved community members; however, they are quick to recognize that, more often than not, government either disagrees, lacks the resources or both.



Strong personal relationships are the basic building blocks beneath meaningful and sustainable public participation efforts.

In order to foster more productive engagement, these civic leaders stress the importance of developing strong personal relationships with commu-

nities, between community leaders and between community leaders and receptive local officials. Such relationships, many leaders said, will foster amicable collaboration and engagement in the future. The first step to building relationships, these leaders argued, is to engage people on a personal level and establish respect and trust—something they believe officials are doing far too infrequently.

When I really want to get someone engaged, I go to them. I go to their home. I go to their community center. I go to their place of work, or I invite them to my home, because by doing that, what you're saying is, "You are personally so important to this decision that I'm coming to talk to you."

The benefits of strong relationships between leaders of civic organizations and local officials are enormous, we often heard. Speaking of one organization that emphasizes this goal, a civic leader explained, "Now, they're at a point in their work that when there's a conversation to be had, they are among the first people that the board of supervisors will call because they want to get the pulse of the community on this issue." Older organizations have seen such relationships grow with their reputations; others have had the privilege of seeing individuals enter into public service from their nonprofit communities—or out of their own leadership trainings.

Local officials who have earned civic leaders' trust have certain qualities: They are visible in the community, they personally interact with residents, they make an honest effort to talk to and get to know communities, they return phone calls, show up when they are invited to events, take advantage of opportunities to meet residents and overall they care about building relationships with all of their constituents.

Deliberative engagement methods resonate strongly with these civic leaders' philosophies, but they stress that the success of such methods depends on their timing, the quality of their execution and whether follow-up takes place.

We asked many of our interviewees to react to the same example of a deliberative public engagement process that we presented to survey respondents. The leaders who are most enthusiastic about deliberative methods feel that they have the potential to overcome many of the pitfalls of typical public hearings and comments. One civic leader who hosts deliberative public engagement events told us about one in which a group of participants sought to derail the process, but they could only disrupt the breakout groups in which they participated. "The rest of the groups could be productive," she explained. "In the normal model, the entire meeting would have been washed to those people. In this model, only maybe, out of 20 groups, a handful weren't productive."

But interviewees also stressed that a method alone cannot overcome two pervasive problems with government's public engagement efforts: Too often they come late in the decision-making process, after most decisions have been made; and they fail to include meaningful follow-up, leaving the public with little confidence in the meaning of their input. Thus, civic leaders emphasized, the positive possibilities of deliberative engagement, if employed as a part of government processes, can be realized only if officials engage residents early and follow up seriously. Furthermore, they emphasized that a deliberative engagement process will have little meaning to the overall state of public engagement if it is a one-off effort. In order to have a real effect, such methods must enter into common use.

Typically we see that the public is involved in the decision-making process extremely late in the game. They're sort of involved after proposals have been developed, after there's some decision making. It's almost like, "Here's what we're thinking—what do you guys think?" There's very little room for the public to really help shape public decisions.

It has the potential to bring people together and to find kind of more cooperative and workable solutions, but a lot, I think, depends on what actually happens to the reports and the recommendations once they're given.

We got the sense that the civic leaders we interviewed are more realistic than most of our civic leader survey respondents about the complexities of implementing the deliberative engagement processes effectively. Many interviewees noted that in order to function "correctly," a deliberative engagement process requires significantly more resources and expertise than traditional, less effective engagement methods. Those who have experience with deliberative methods told us that well-trained facilitators are absolutely essential.

Without them, they argued, the diversity of public input expected from the process and potential gains in trust among community members can easily evaporate. Equally important, leaders told us, are solutions to common barriers such as scheduling, translation and transportation. Executed without care, the deliberative process may simply reproduce the social currents and power dynamics that keep people out of the system in the first place.

I think the pitfall is that it requires a lot of work and a lot of organization. You have to provide some logistic support. You need to provide interpretation. You need to provide child care. It is a resource-intensive way of engaging residents. When sticking a mic in the middle of the room, there are very few needed resources going with that.

Ultimately, these civic leaders hesitate to support the deliberative model as a one-size-fits-all solution. While they are enthusiastic about its potential benefits, they could not judge its value separate from the context of its implementation. As one leader said, "I think that we have to customize the way we approach communities, so that the manner in which they are engaged is one that they find helpful." They generally agree that the deliberative method should be one engagement tool among many.

These leaders talked about a number of challenges that they feel continue to stand in the way of more inclusive and meaningful public engagement.

- **Local officials are still largely reactive—they are rarely proactive.** From the perspective of these leaders, too many officials wait for their communities to engage them. In failing to reach out independently, they miss many opportunities to gain public knowledge, build relationships with residents and CBOs, improve their reputations and collaborate in meaningful ways. A common sentiment among our interviewees was well captured by one, who stated, "I don't think engagement efforts have been local officials' efforts. They've been our efforts."

- **Most local officials and their staff lack training and resources for robust organizing and engagement.** Civic leaders told us that officials typically arrive in office without a background in engagement or organizing. To paraphrase one civic leader, there is an emphasis on representative—not participatory—democracy. Paired with tight budgets in government, this means that even where public input is welcome, government does not dedicate the resources or staff to ensuring engagement is properly organized and executed.

I don't think that culturally the system right now demands that they be better at community engagement. I think that until there is really a demand made of any elected official to have a better way of engaging the community, that is not going to change.

- **There are too many missed opportunities even when efforts are made.** Leaders listed examples of engagement efforts that did not fulfill their potential because of a lack of coordination, understanding, commitment or functional relationships between the public and officials. Many of these leaders placed the onus on officials who, for instance, scheduled meetings at times and in locations particularly inconvenient for working individuals and low-income, minority and immigrant communities. Leaders also talked about local governments' halfhearted efforts to build community capacity and their subsequent failure to seriously employ this capacity toward decision making. One leader gave us this example:

The program didn't exactly work as planned because in an ideal world we would have done capacity building first, then education with community residents, and then they would have had an opportunity to engage directly in the city's project. But these activities were happening simultaneously. In some instances, residents were being included as the cities were planning their projects, and in other instances the cities completed their projects

before the community leadership project ended.

- **Engagement efforts tend not to occur early in the decision-making process and still too often lack meaningful follow-up.** The big questions these leaders have about the implementation of a deliberative process (see above) are also the main challenges to any engagement initiative: Will the public be involved early enough in the process to contribute in a meaningful way? And will officials respond to and act upon the public's input?
- **Changing government processes is difficult.** The ultimate ideal is to institutionalize more meaningful public engagement processes—not just to stage one-off events—but several interviewees echoed one civic leader's insistence that “to change a government process is virtually impossible.” Another emphasized the difficulty of forming an effective public campaign around “process change,” an issue that does not excite the public as do issues more proximal to their lives.
- **Antigovernment sentiment and an individualistic culture have become more common.** Some civic leaders believe that the public is more ready to blame individuals for their misfortunes than to view systemic problems as a root cause of individual struggles. Meanwhile, “Less government is better” has become a popular slogan among the public and officials. Insofar as residents have these views, civic leaders consider it their responsibility to instruct them in the importance of government. But when officials espouse such views, civic leaders said there is little they can do; to paraphrase one interviewee, how do you work with a government official who doesn't believe in government?

What has changed, and where is public engagement headed?

Despite their criticisms and the many challenges these leaders face in their public engagement efforts, many of our interviewees feel that, compared with just a few years ago, public engagement in California has improved. Looking back and looking forward, these leaders identified a number of reasons to be optimistic about their work and their communities' inclusion in local government decisions.

- **More allies in public office.** Over the past decade, these leaders have seen more partners and people they've trained move into public service. Those new allies bring with them a commitment to the issues faced by low-income, minority and immigrant communities and a greater commitment to inclusive engagement. Though these new officials represent a minority and unsuccessful engagement efforts remain common, these leaders said this trend is growing.

Particularly in the period that we're in now we have a lot more people that are within government that we consider allies before going in. Having been initially an outside organization, we now have people on the inside, so we have to have both parallel inside-outside strategies to be effective in our work.

- **Community-based organizations have become more sophisticated in their work.** Many of our interviewees argued that public participation in government decision making has improved because organizations like theirs have become more effective with time and experience. They spoke of more and better organizations achieving success across California, partnering with communities small and large to create meaningful public engagement in government.

I feel like there's evolving and stronger independent infrastructure to advocate for better public participation. I think, more and more, the kinds of independent community organizations that work on those issues have gotten more savvy over the years.

- **Community-based organizations have gained clout.** Many of these leaders stressed that their organizations and networks have been around for some time, have had success in their efforts and thus have built strong reputations among the public and officials. Moreover, these leaders feel that local communities and political leaders have come to expect the involvement of civic organizations, understand that they are there to stay and even rely on them for knowledge and resources.



As we've become more established, more people reach out to us and alert us to things. We're seen as kind of a resource, and in the beginning it was more of the door knocking and that kind of outreach.

We now have credibility in the landscape. We have enough members now that for an official not to come to our event would make that individual look bad.

- **Leaders working with Latino communities feel that, partly due to their work, their constituency has gained more power, influence and respect over the years.** Some leaders believe that politicians are less likely now than in years past to ignore the needs of the Latino community, because Latinos have grown in number and in votes, and because they have become more organized. Nonetheless, these leaders stressed that there is still significant work to be done for Latinos and other traditionally disenfranchised groups to have a voice in important government policy making.

Are individuals being left out? Are there potential stakeholders that are not at the table? Absolutely. Are we 100 percent there? No, but are we further along than we were? Absolutely. And when you look at the shift of demographics, particularly in California, there are some stakeholders that you just can't afford to leave out.



RECOMMENDATIONS

for supporting more effective and
inclusive public engagement¹⁹

¹⁹These suggestions were developed by Public Agenda based on the current research and decades of practical experience supporting sound public engagement.

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR STRONGER PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Based on this research, as well as decades of experience supporting sound public engagement, Public Agenda proposes a number of recommendations for local officials and civic and community-based organizations who seek to improve the public decision-making process by including broad cross sections of the public in meaningful deliberations, as well as for foundations and other supporters interested in funding these efforts. Our point is not that every local official should be using deliberative methods all the time but that these “deeper” approaches should be seen as a “tool in the toolbox” of public problem solving. Our research demonstrates that interest in more innovative processes—compared with, say, a traditional public hearing—appears to be growing, and that this interest can be supported by the right strategies, which we outline in the following sections.



This research revealed that California’s civic leaders believe there is significant room for improvement in local government officials’ efforts to include the public in their decision making. Most civic leaders expressed a willingness to collaborate with local officials to improve public engagement processes in their communities.

Interestingly, California’s civic leaders’ and local officials’ views, attitudes and ambitions regarding public engagement are more complementary than one might expect. Both groups see major shortcomings in traditional public hearings and comment opportunities, which exclude large sectors of the public. Both groups expressed a keen interest in, and some experience with, more inclusive and deliberative forms of public engagement. About half of local officials and four in ten civic leaders reported having participated in a collaborative effort in the past twelve months that sought meaningful public input on an issue and provided a diverse group of residents with the chance to deliberate on the trade-offs of public decisions. Despite their general interest, many civic leaders and local officials also have some reservations about the benefits and costs of such a process.

Here are a number of recommendations for local officials and for civic and community-based organizations who seek to include broad cross sections of the public in meaningful deliberations, and for funders who want to support these efforts.

IDEAS FOR LOCAL OFFICIALS:

- **Network with colleagues about better ways to engage the public.** Many local officials are frustrated with the public engagement status quo and interested in exploring alternative means to involve residents. It would likely be fruitful for local officials to engage and learn from each other by comparing experiences, sharing the cost of professional development and exchanging strategies and practical resources. Local officials who have seen community relations and local decision making improve as a result of more deliberative engagement processes could lead these networking efforts and help their more tentative colleagues identify opportunities to experiment with new engagement approaches in their communities.
- **Build ongoing and sustaining capacity through professional development and by making engagement competencies a criterion when hiring new staff.** There are numerous organizations, associations and academic institutions, both California based and national, through which local officials can gain information, resources, training and other tools to support deliberative public engagement. (For instance, the League of California Cities and the California Association of Counties presently support their own Institute for Local Government, which makes public

engagement and other resources available to local officials in California; and the Davenport Institute, at Pepperdine University, is an example of a prominent academic institution that offers local governments and community-based organizations public engagement support and training.) Moreover, auditing existing public engagement skills and knowledge within their departments and agencies will help local officials assess their strengths and weaknesses, which can then be augmented and addressed as new hires are made over time.

- **Evaluate local public engagement efforts.** Ongoing capacity building is also increased by local officials' evaluation of their own engagement experiments. Evaluations should be planned around clearly established goals and expectations. They can be used to tweak ongoing engagement processes as well as to inform future ones. Lessons learned through evaluations also constitute a valuable resource to be shared with colleagues and thus to inform public engagement efforts elsewhere.
- **Reach out to civic and community-based organizations to make them partners in public engagement.** This survey found that most local officials are not effectively accessing the resources and networks of civic and community-based organizations, particularly those that could help them reach traditionally disenfranchised groups. Meanwhile, our companion study with civic leaders suggests that many civic and community-based organizations are seeking stronger relationships and better collaboration with their local officials. Building long-term and trusting partnerships between local government and civic organizations has the potential to improve public participation opportunities and help spread the use of more deliberative forms of engagement across communities.



IDEAS FOR CIVIC LEADERS:

- **Partner with local officials who are interested in finding better ways to engage the public.** Many local officials are frustrated with the public engagement status quo, and they are interested in exploring alternative means to engage residents and others. Now may be the right time to engage local officials more directly in serious discussions about how to improve public participation in local government decision making, and to share stories of successes, build partnerships and establish common expectations and goals. Among the many ways that civic and community-based organizations can support better community engagement are:
 - Codesigning and cohosting forums (which sometimes is appropriate and beneficial to do in partnerships with public agencies and officials)
 - Recruiting and/or training facilitators and recorders
 - Providing venues, volunteers, childcare, food and other ingredients for productive community conversations
 - Supporting the creation of nonpartisan discussion materials and guides
 - Recruiting diverse participants (certainly among the most important roles community-based organizations can play)
 - Playing a role in forum evaluation and follow-up (such as supporting new public-private-civil society partnerships, helping to communicate the results of forums, etc.)
- **Build capacity by networking and sharing resources with other civic and community-based organizations, and through professional development and systematic evaluation of public engagement efforts.** Many civic leaders, we found, feel that their organizations may lack resources and staff to implement comprehensive deliberative engagement processes. Collaborations with other organizations—to share resources and to benefit from each other’s experience and networks—are therefore important. Moreover, there are numerous organizations, associations and academic institutions, both California based and national, through which civic leaders and public officials alike can access training and tools to support deliberative public engagement. Capacity can be further increased by planning for systematic self-assessment and evaluations of engagement efforts. Using and sharing the results of evaluations can build stronger partnerships with local officials and other civic organizations and improve public engagement efforts in the future.



IDEAS FOR FUNDERS:

- **Support local officials and civic and community-based organizations in efforts to build long-term partnerships that expand and improve opportunities for public participation.**

This research points to a lack of strong, ongoing relationships between local government and civic and community-based organizations. Most local officials are not effectively accessing the resources and networks of community organizations, particularly those that could help them reach traditionally disenfranchised groups. And many civic leaders, especially those serving immigrant and low-income communities, seek better relationships with their local officials but also criticize them for not providing adequate opportunities for participation. Supporting the development of long-term and trusting partnerships between civic organizations and local government has the potential to improve public participation opportunities and help spread the use of more deliberative forms of engagement across communities. Sometimes a small amount of seed money to experiment with an early partnership between a public agency and a community organization can result in a long-term relationship that nurtures community growth well beyond a specific instance of public engagement.

- **Sponsor trainings and technical assistance for local governments and communities to build ongoing and sustaining public engagement capacity.** Rather than providing support for single engagement activities, funders could help communities develop the goals, principles and practices to guide the successful and recurring use of public engagement in appropriate instances over time. For example, they could help make available a wide range of existing public engagement-related skills, strategies and tools from which local officials and civic and community-based organizations can benefit, including: public engagement design, participant identification and recruitment, issue framing, process facilitation, communication



strategies, evaluation and the preparation of background and discussion materials. Funders could also sponsor opportunities for shared strategy and skill development for the staff of local governments and community-based organizations, thus promoting relationship building and collaborative experimentation with public engagement processes.

- **Document and share stories of success.** In pursuing any innovation, it is helpful to document and to build on initial successes through compelling stories that encourage replication, especially by those 47 percent we identified as “tentative” local officials. This includes providing opportunities for local officials to respond to these stories, ask questions and get advice from their more experienced peers on how best to replicate deliberative engagement process in their communities.
- **Support experiments with online engagement tools and digital technologies in order to share best practices.** As we all know, the online world is constantly changing, and new platforms and strategies for engaging communities online continually emerge. But most officials still feel that these tools are hard to use effectively and that their impacts are hard to gauge. Experiments and evaluations underwritten by foundations can be one means to support, assess and share what works online.

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- **Address the engagement needs of rural communities.** This survey suggests that more needs to be done so that officials in California’s rural areas can be equally informed, equipped and supported in their efforts to engage the public. Rural officials are in even greater need of capacity-building assistance than their suburban and urban counterparts. Rural communities might warrant dedicated experiments in online engagement and distance learning.
 - **Support research and evaluation of public engagement methods and publicize best practices.** Funders can be particularly influential in expanding research and evaluation into various public engagement methods, especially approaches that are explicitly designed to overcome challenges common to more traditional engagement formats. To this end, it is important to encourage and support local officials in assessing their own engagement efforts, and to promote independent research that tracks ongoing public engagement trends and impacts. Some of the main questions that need to be answered are: Which issues are most and least suitable for which types of public engagement strategies? Can deliberative methods engage more citizens and address the problems of public anger and mistrust? Do these methods lead to better decisions? What types of technical assistance and capacity building have the greatest impact in helping local officials succeed in their search for more effective methods of dialogue with the public? And how can more inclusive and deliberative forms of engagement shape the political and economic life of a community in the long term?

METHODOLOGY

Summary

The findings in “Beyond Business as Usual” are based on 462 survey interviews with leaders of civic and community-based organizations in California—civic leaders—conducted from July 10 to August 22, 2012, by phone and online. The survey was designed by Public Agenda and fielding was carried out by Social Science Research Solutions Inc. (SSRS). The survey was preceded by three focus groups and 14 in-depth qualitative interviews with leaders of civic and community-based organizations across California. In addition, Public Agenda conducted a qualitative research study on 20 community-based organizations whose work focuses on civic engagement in low-income, immigrant and racial/ethnic minority communities specifically. All 20 organizations were grantees of The James Irvine Foundation in 2011 or 2012. Public Agenda conducted in-depth, semi-structured phone interviews with the heads of these organizations.

Choosing civic leaders

For the purposes of our work, we defined civic leaders as the heads of 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations that regularly engage the public on issues that affect their communities. Drawing on the work of the National Center for Charitable Statistics, we utilized tax records—the March 2012 IRS Business Master File—to create a list of 501(c)(3) organizations in California falling into one of 113 NTEE (National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities) categories, which group nonprofits first under broad topics (such as health services, education) and then by activity type (e.g., training, advocacy, research). Adapting insights gleaned from our qualitative research, Public Agenda selected 113 categories that were expected to produce a sample of organizations most likely to be involved in civic engagement efforts in their communities. This process eventually yielded a list of 18,334 organizations, from which 8,500 were randomly sampled as potential survey participants. Names and contact information for organizations’ highest-ranking officers were then merged, when available, from a list obtained from Dun & Bradstreet Inc.

Finally, a screening question was included at the beginning of the survey: To qualify, respondents had to indicate that at least one of the “major goals” of their organization, or two of their “minor goals,” was included in this list of activities:

- To encourage public participation in local government decision making
- To inform or work with local officials on issues of concern to their organization’s membership or community
- To actively organize and engage the public on issues that affect their lives and/or communities

The survey

Organizations were initially notified of the survey through mailed invitation letters, addressed to the highest-ranking officer if that information was available. The study itself was conducted online (370 respondents) and by phone (92 respondents). The response rate for this study was calculated to be 12.4 percent using AAPOR’s RR3 formula. A total of 241 potential respondents were screened out by the “major/minor goal” question at the beginning of the survey. Respondents were also considered ineligible if they completed the survey but indicated that they held a position not considered to be the leader of a 501(c)(3) (e.g. assistant). If an invitation letter was returned as non-deliverable, it was assumed that the organization no longer exists, and the organization was treated as ineligible.

Only senior staff members were asked to take the survey. Among our respondents, 41 percent hold the title executive director; 18 percent president; 17 percent CEO; 6 percent director. Other respondents variously hold titles such as program director, chairman, CFO and vice president.

The five populations most commonly served by these organizations are: low-income families or individuals (34 percent), the general public (26 percent), residents of a particular area (24 percent), ethnic or racial minorities (18 percent) and individuals with physical or mental health concerns (17 percent).

Types of organizations surveyed

Below are the most common organization types found in the final sample used for the survey. These categories are given by the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE).

- Human Services (25%)
 - Community Empowerment/Capacity Building (14%)
 - Environmental Quality Protection and Beautification (8%)
 - Religion and Spiritual Development (8%)
 - Arts, Culture and Humanities (7%)
 - Education (excluding schools) (7%)
 - Crime/Legal Related (5%)
 - Housing and Shelter (5%)
 - Mental Health (4%)
 - Philanthropy, Voluntarism and Grantmaking (limited to community foundations) (4%)
 - Public, Society Benefit (4%)
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Thirty-eight percent of organizations do their work in “mostly urban” communities, while 21 percent are in “mostly suburban” communities and 16 percent said they are in “mostly rural” communities (the remainder work in communities that combine two or all of the above).

The final data, once collected, was weighted by SSRS to balance the sample to known population parameters in order to correct for systematic under- or overrepresentation for groups of civic leaders. The weighting procedure utilized iterative proportional fitting process, or “raking.” Parameter estimates were drawn from the sample file of 18,334 organizations provided by Public Agenda.

The data was balanced to resemble the sample distribution of civic leaders, to the following parameters:

- Region of California: Bay Area, Central Coast, Nonurban Northern California, San Joaquin Valley/ Central and Southern Sierra, or Southern California.
- Whether or not a phone number was appended: known phone number or not.
- Whether or not the name of the highest-ranking officer was appended: known name or not.

The design effect for the survey was 1.66 and the weight-adjusted margin of error is +/- 5.87. The final weights for individual respondents ranged from 0.38 to 3.31.

As in all surveys, question order effects and other non-sampling sources of error can affect the results. Steps were taken to minimize these issues, including pretesting the survey instrument and randomizing the order in which some questions were asked.

Focus groups and qualitative interviews with civic leaders

Public Agenda conducted three focus groups and 14 individual interviews with a selection of civic leaders prior to the survey; through these conversations we explored leaders’ experiences and perceptions of public engagement in California, and how effectively they feel officials engage the public. Quotes from these focus groups and interviews appear throughout this report to illustrate the views quantified in the survey results. The focus groups took place in San Francisco, Fresno and San Diego. Civic leaders who were interviewed came from throughout the state. A total of 44 civic leaders participated in this part of the research.

In-depth interviews with leaders of organizations that engage traditionally disenfranchised communities

Twenty-one leaders of 20 organizations participated in in-depth, hour-long interviews with Public Agenda researchers. All organizations qualified for the statewide survey of civic leaders. They were selected for in-depth interviews because of their special focus on engaging low-income, immigrant and racial/ethnic minority communities on local public decisions. All 20 organizations were grantees of The James Irvine Foundation in 2011 and/or 2012.

FULL SURVEY RESULTS

“Beyond Business as Usual” is based on 462 survey interviews with California civic leaders conducted from July 10 to August 22, 2012, via phone and internet. The survey was fielded by Social Science Research Solutions Inc., and the questionnaire was designed by Public Agenda. The margin of error for the complete set of weighted data is plus or minus 5.87 percent. However, it is higher when comparing subgroups or question items that weren’t asked of all respondents.

Survey results of less than 0.5 percent are signified by an asterisk, while results of zero are signified by a dash. Responses may not always total 100 percent due to rounding. Combining answer categories may produce slight discrepancies between numbers in these results and numbers in the report. Finally, note that questions 1-3 were screening questions that have been omitted from the results below.

	Total N=462 %	Bay Area n=125 %	Central Coast n=50 %	Nonurban Northern California n=68 %	San Joaquin Valley/ Central & Southern Sierra n=50 %	Southern California n=169 %
4. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the efforts made by most local public officials to include the public in government decision making?						
Very satisfied	11	7	10	8	14	13
Somewhat satisfied	42	49	45	37	39	39
Somewhat dissatisfied	30	22	26	39	39	31
Very dissatisfied	14	15	3	16	8	16
Don't know	4	7	16	-	-	2
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
5. [Subgroup: only those who answered “Very dissatisfied” or “Somewhat dissatisfied” to Q4] Can you think of at least one local public official who’s making an exceptional effort to include the public in government decision making, or is there no such person that you’re aware of?						
Yes, at least one	56	58	44	39	65	58
No such person	32	40	44	29	29	30
Don't know	12	2	11	32	6	12
Refused/No answer	*	-	-	-	-	-

	Total N=462 %	Bay Area n=125 %	Central Coast n=50 %	Nonurban Northern California n=68 %	San Joaquin Valley/ Central & Southern Sierra n=50 %	Southern California n=169 %
6. How close does each statement come to your own views on the public and local public officials?						
Most residents are too busy with day-to-day life to get actively involved in public decision making.						
Very close	42	42	48	44	38	42
Somewhat close	43	39	39	46	38	45
Not too close	10	9	13	8	11	10
Not close at all	4	8	-	2	14	2
Don't know	1	3	-	-	-	*
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
Most residents keep abreast of the issues that affect the community's well-being.						
Very close	7	5	3	2	17	7
Somewhat close	28	25	23	28	17	33
Not too close	35	36	39	39	42	32
Not close at all	28	31	29	29	25	28
Don't know	2	3	7	2	-	1
Refused/No answer	*	1	-	-	-	-
Local public officials only pay attention to powerful interest groups.						
Very close	33	26	26	31	41	37
Somewhat close	42	40	52	37	35	43
Not too close	15	24	16	15	8	11
Not close at all	8	6	7	12	16	7
Don't know	3	3	-	6	-	2
Refused/No answer	*	1	-	-	-	-
Local public officials seem to be making more of an effort to engage a wide variety of people in public decision making.						
Very close	8	9	9	4	6	8
Somewhat close	33	41	31	35	36	28
Not too close	38	34	50	35	39	39
Not close at all	19	14	6	21	19	23
Don't know	2	3	3	6	-	2
Refused/No answer	*	-	-	-	-	*

	Total N=462 %	Bay Area n=125 %	Central Coast n=50 %	Nonurban Northern California n=68 %	San Joaquin Valley/ Central & Southern Sierra n=50 %	Southern California n=169 %
Residents have ample opportunity to participate in local government decisions.						
Very close	16	12	10	12	14	20
Somewhat close	38	37	55	54	36	33
Not too close	31	30	29	19	42	32
Not close at all	14	18	3	14	8	15
Don't know	2	3	3	2	-	1
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
The public has become much angrier and mistrustful of local public officials in recent years.						
Very close	42	41	52	40	43	41
Somewhat close	35	34	19	17	31	42
Not too close	14	17	19	21	11	11
Not close at all	7	5	7	17	14	4
Don't know	2	2	3	6	-	2
Refused/No answer	*	1	-	-	-	-
Residents who don't belong to an organized group that can mobilize them are often left out of public decision making.						
Very close	44	44	42	43	57	44
Somewhat close	38	34	36	30	29	43
Not too close	10	13	10	15	6	7
Not close at all	5	4	7	6	9	5
Don't know	3	4	7	6	-	2
Refused/No answer	*	1	-	-	-	-
Local public officials only attend community events if they think they'll get positive publicity.						
Very close	36	30	36	31	39	40
Somewhat close	35	29	36	37	36	38
Not too close	18	19	23	18	19	16
Not close at all	8	15	7	10	6	4
Don't know	3	7	-	4	-	1
Refused/No answer	*	-	-	-	-	*

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Local public officials too often become isolated from the residents they serve.						
Very close	28	23	19	32	41	28
Somewhat close	43	38	42	26	43	50
Not too close	19	28	26	21	8	14
Not close at all	9	7	13	21	8	7
Don't know	2	5	-	-	-	1
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
Local public officials are too quick to do what's popular instead of what's right.						
Very close	31	20	26	32	40	35
Somewhat close	39	48	39	17	34	39
Not too close	16	19	26	21	9	13
Not close at all	7	4	3	19	17	6
Don't know	6	6	7	11	-	6
Refused/No answer	1	3	-	-	-	*
7. One way for local officials to engage with the public is through public hearings and comments at council, board or commission meetings. In the past 12 months, how many times have you personally attended such a meeting?						
Never	19	21	16	17	11	21
Once or twice	34	32	36	25	44	35
Every few months	28	32	26	31	28	26
At least once a month	9	5	13	14	6	10
More than once a month	9	9	10	10	11	9
Don't know	1	1	-	4	-	-
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
8. [Subgroup: only those who did not answer "Never" or "Don't know" to Q7] For each of the following items, please tell me whether or not this TYPICALLY takes place at these public forums.						
They are effective in explaining issues to ordinary residents.						
Yes	39	34	30	51	38	39
No	51	53	48	42	50	53
Don't know	11	13	22	7	13	8
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-

	Total N=462 %	Bay Area n=125 %	Central Coast n=50 %	Nonurban Northern California n=68 %	San Joaquin Valley/ Central & Southern Sierra n=50 %	Southern California n=169 %
They generate meaningful discussions among ordinary residents.						
Yes	41	37	35	57	34	42
No	49	53	50	36	59	48
Don't know	10	11	15	7	6	10
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
They give officials a solid understanding of the public's concerns and preferences.						
Yes	42	43	52	54	41	38
No	48	54	30	34	53	50
Don't know	10	3	19	12	6	11
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
They are important venues where I can represent the interests of my organization and its members or clients.						
Yes	68	67	74	86	58	65
No	27	28	15	12	42	30
Don't know	5	5	11	2	-	5
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
They often lead to gripe sessions.						
Yes	60	71	65	37	61	59
No	31	22	15	56	30	31
Don't know	9	8	12	7	9	10
Refused/No answer	1	-	8	-	-	-
They exclude broad sections of the public.						
Yes	49	50	33	48	46	52
No	41	41	48	45	46	38
Don't know	9	9	19	7	9	9
Refused/No answer	1	-	-	-	-	2

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9. To what extent would you say the perspectives of your organization's members or clients are considered in local government decision making?						
Well considered	11	12	22	16	14	7
Somewhat considered	41	39	50	37	44	42
Not too considered	31	31	13	28	31	33
Not considered at all	16	16	9	18	11	16
Don't know	2	3	6	2	-	2
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
10. [Subgroup: only those who did not answer "Well considered" to Q9] If you had to choose one, which of these four do you think is the MAIN reason why the perspectives of your organization's members or clients are not well considered in local government decision making?						
Our members or clients don't know how to get involved.	27	32	24	21	26	26
Our members or clients stay away because they're distrustful of local public officials.	19	13	12	14	26	23
Our members or clients are not given adequate opportunities to get involved.	23	23	32	26	26	22
Our members or clients are not interested in getting involved.	21	21	12	21	19	22
Don't know	10	10	20	19	3	8
Refused/No answer	1	2	-	-	-	1
12. In general, how responsive would you say most local public officials are to requests and input from your organization?						
Very responsive	19	21	23	29	14	15
Somewhat responsive	43	38	55	39	50	45
Not too responsive	19	22	7	16	28	19
Not responsive at all	10	8	-	6	6	14
My organization doesn't make such requests	8	9	13	10	3	7
Don't know	1	2	3	-	-	*
Refused/No answer	*	1	-	-	-	-

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13. How often does your organization do each of the following?						
Advocate for public policies that will benefit your members or clients						
Regularly— it's a main function	29	31	29	38	31	25
Occasionally— we do it as needed	40	42	39	23	42	44
Rarely	16	20	16	11	17	14
Never	14	6	16	23	11	17
Don't know	1	2	-	6	-	*
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
Collaborate with local public officials to design or cosponsor activities that encourage public participation in local government decision making						
Regularly— it's a main function	11	12	16	10	11	10
Occasionally— we do it as needed	33	32	34	31	47	31
Rarely	32	39	19	25	22	32
Never	25	17	31	35	19	26
Don't know	*	-	-	-	-	*
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
Conduct surveys and needs assessments to inform local government policy decisions						
Regularly— it's a main function	5	5	3	4	3	6
Occasionally— we do it as needed	29	28	41	21	31	28
Rarely	28	37	22	33	25	23
Never	38	30	31	37	42	42
Don't know	1	-	3	6	-	*
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-

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Facilitate community conversations where your members or clients, other community residents and local public officials discuss solutions to issues						
Regularly— it's a main function	15	15	19	10	14	16
Occasionally— we do it as needed	43	53	32	37	57	38
Rarely	25	24	26	21	16	28
Never	16	8	23	29	14	17
Don't know	1	-	-	4	-	*
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
Get the word out on public issues that affect your members or clients						
Regularly— it's a main function	31	32	26	37	27	31
Occasionally— we do it as needed	50	58	39	48	60	46
Rarely	12	8	13	14	3	15
Never	6	3	16	2	11	8
Don't know	*	-	-	-	-	*
Refused/No answer	*	-	7	-	-	-
Join commissions, advisory committees or task forces to advise local public officials about your members' or clients' concerns						
Regularly— it's a main function	23	31	26	23	26	19
Occasionally— we do it as needed	37	36	39	34	43	38
Rarely	19	21	13	19	11	20
Never	20	13	23	21	20	23
Don't know	1	-	-	4	-	*
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-

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Organize events such as rallies, protests, or in-person visits to local public officials' offices						
Regularly— it's a main function	8	7	6	2	8	10
Occasionally— we do it as needed	21	32	19	19	22	15
Rarely	22	17	22	21	22	26
Never	48	43	53	54	47	49
Don't know	1	2	-	4	-	*
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
Work to ensure a large and broadly representative turnout at public meetings with public officials						
Regularly— it's a main function	9	8	10	9	9	9
Occasionally— we do it as needed	32	43	39	26	43	24
Rarely	33	26	29	26	26	39
Never	26	23	23	32	23	27
Don't know	1	-	-	6	-	*
Refused/No answer	1	-	-	-	-	1
Invite local public officials to events where they would meet your organization's members or clients						
Regularly— it's a main function	31	27	32	26	31	34
Occasionally— we do it as needed	45	45	48	42	44	46
Rarely	16	24	7	17	17	12
Never	7	4	13	9	8	8
Don't know	1	-	-	6	-	*
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
14. [Subgroup: only those who answered "Regularly" or "Occasionally" to Q13 "Invite local public officials to events where they would meet your organization's members or clients"] And do the local public officials TYPICALLY attend the events they are invited to, or not?						
Yes	63	70	65	53	63	60
No	33	24	31	44	37	35
Don't know	3	2	4	3	-	3
Refused/No answer	2	4	-	-	-	1

	Total N=462 %	Bay Area n=125 %	Central Coast n=50 %	Nonurban Northern California n=68 %	San Joaquin Valley/ Central & Southern Sierra n=50 %	Southern California n=169 %
15. When your organization collaborated with a local public official on an issue of concern, how closely does the following describe your organization's experiences?						
Collaborating with local public officials helped my organization achieve its goal.						
Very close	17	19	23	14	11	17
Somewhat close	27	23	37	21	35	28
Not too close	18	21	17	19	16	15
Not close at all	10	9	10	12	8	12
Not applicable/My organization hasn't done this in the past 12 months	26	28	13	33	22	25
Don't know	2	-	-	2	8	3
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
The collaboration helped improve local government decision making.						
Very close	10	15	13	6	14	6
Somewhat close	27	24	34	26	24	28
Not too close	18	16	22	14	19	19
Not close at all	12	9	13	16	11	12
Not applicable/My organization hasn't done this in the past 12 months	27	30	16	31	27	27
Don't know	7	6	3	8	5	8
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
The collaboration was effective in building community trust.						
Very close	11	9	12	14	22	10
Somewhat close	36	37	52	27	24	36
Not too close	13	13	12	15	16	13
Not close at all	11	9	9	15	8	11
Not applicable/My organization hasn't done this in the past 12 months	23	27	12	29	22	21
Don't know	6	4	3	-	8	9
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-

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Local officials wanted to maintain too much control over the process.						
Very close	14	14	9	13	17	14
Somewhat close	16	18	22	21	8	15
Not too close	24	21	38	15	39	23
Not close at all	18	15	16	21	11	19
Not applicable/My organization hasn't done this in the past 12 months	23	27	13	30	19	21
Don't know	6	6	3	-	6	7
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
Too many local officials used the collaboration for publicity but not because they cared about our community.						
Very close	8	5	3	6	19	8
Somewhat close	18	13	19	14	11	22
Not too close	21	20	32	17	16	21
Not close at all	25	29	26	31	27	21
Not applicable/My organization hasn't done this in the past 12 months	23	26	16	31	19	21
Don't know	6	8	3	2	8	5
Refused/No answer	*	-	-	-	-	*
Working with local public officials was too time consuming and required too many resources.						
Very close	9	8	6	4	6	12
Somewhat close	15	21	25	14	17	11
Not too close	21	21	31	14	19	22
Not close at all	27	21	22	39	33	27
Not applicable/My organization hasn't done this in the past 12 months	24	27	16	31	19	23
Don't know	3	2	-	-	6	4
Refused/No answer	*	-	-	-	-	*

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The next few questions are based on the following scenario:						
Local public officials and community-based organizations bring together a large and diverse group of residents who meet for several hours to discuss a public issue facing the community. Participants break into small discussion groups; each contains a variety of people and perspectives and is led by a facilitator. The small groups report back suggestions for action, and a memo integrating their views is later shared with participants and the community, and it is presented to appropriate local public officials.						
16. Has your organization ever been involved in a public engagement process similar to this, or not?						
Yes	43	43	44	40	56	41
No	51	49	50	60	39	51
Don't know	6	8	6	-	6	6
Refused/No answer	1	-	-	-	-	2
17. [Subgroup: only those who answered "No" or "Don't know" to Q16] Generally speaking, how interested would you be in your organization collaborating in a process like this with local public officials?						
Very interested	32	21	35	32	38	36
Somewhat interested	38	44	47	13	31	40
Not too interested	18	18	12	42	13	14
Not interested at all	9	6	6	13	19	9
Don't know	4	12	-	-	-	1
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
18. [Subgroup: only those who answered "Yes" to Q16] How likely is it that your organization would do this again?						
Very likely	54	50	50	57	74	52
Somewhat likely	35	36	36	43	-	41
Not too likely	6	6	14	-	26	2
Not likely at all	5	8	-	-	-	6
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
19. How much would you say that a public engagement process like this would benefit your organization's members or clients?						
A great deal	29	21	31	25	38	33
Some	36	36	50	32	30	35
A little	19	27	13	21	22	15
Not at all	11	10	-	21	11	11
Don't know	5	6	6	2	-	6
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-

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20. Here are some possible outcomes that could result from using this kind of public engagement process. Would you say this is likely to happen with your members/clients?						
Fresh ideas and solutions would be heard.						
Yes	77	69	78	79	77	80
No	7	9	9	8	9	6
Don't know	16	22	13	13	14	14
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
Your members/clients would end up frustrated because nothing important would come of it.						
Yes	38	42	38	44	47	33
No	34	33	34	27	31	36
Don't know	28	25	28	29	22	31
Refused/No answer	*	1	-	-	-	-
Your members/clients would gain skills and habits of participation.						
Yes	72	64	81	80	75	74
No	17	22	6	10	14	17
Don't know	11	14	13	10	11	9
Refused/No answer	*	-	-	-	-	-
Your members/clients would be intimidated by the process.						
Yes	27	20	16	32	33	30
No	59	57	52	57	61	62
Don't know	14	23	32	11	6	8
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
The concerns and preferences of your members/clients would be better understood.						
Yes	83	76	81	79	83	87
No	7	10	6	10	11	5
Don't know	10	14	13	12	6	8
Refused/No answer	*	-	-	-	-	-
Public decisions made this way would be more sound.						
Yes	67	64	75	69	81	64
No	11	13	9	8	8	12
Don't know	22	23	16	23	11	24
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-

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21. How capable do you think your organization would be of implementing this type of public engagement process?						
Very capable	34	29	47	21	34	37
Somewhat capable	37	39	38	44	40	35
Not too capable	16	17	6	23	20	14
Not at all capable	5	3	3	4	3	6
Not applicable	6	9	-	8	3	5
Don't know	3	3	6	-	-	3
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
22. Here are some challenges to implementing this kind of public engagement process. How much of a challenge do you think each would be?						
Identifying the appropriate issues to discuss						
A major challenge	10	13	13	8	17	8
A minor challenge	41	36	26	40	46	46
No challenge	47	48	61	51	37	44
Don't know	2	2	-	2	-	2
Refused/No answer	*	1	-	-	-	*
Bringing together a large and diverse group of residents						
A major challenge	36	34	32	35	43	37
A minor challenge	41	40	42	42	29	42
No challenge	20	22	26	21	29	17
Don't know	3	4	-	2	-	4
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
Providing useful background information and discussion materials						
A major challenge	16	14	16	12	20	16
A minor challenge	45	47	29	41	51	48
No challenge	36	34	48	47	29	33
Don't know	3	5	7	-	-	3
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-

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Providing skilled facilitators to lead the discussion						
A major challenge	23	20	19	18	34	25
A minor challenge	40	40	32	47	29	41
No challenge	35	39	42	31	37	32
Don't know	3	2	7	4	-	2
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
Analyzing and synthesizing the input received						
A major challenge	25	25	26	27	31	24
A minor challenge	44	44	36	37	53	45
No challenge	28	29	32	33	17	28
Don't know	3	3	7	4	-	3
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
23. [Subgroup: only those who answered "A major challenge" at least once to Q22] Generally speaking, do you think these challenges are mostly because your organization doesn't have the expertise to do these things, or is it mostly because it lacks the necessary resources and staff?						
My organization doesn't have the expertise	1	1	-	4	3	-
My organization lacks the necessary resources and staff	55	53	81	60	56	51
Both	28	29	12	13	27	34
Neither	16	16	8	23	15	15
Don't know	*	1	-	-	-	1
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
24. As far as you are aware, do your local public officials REGULARLY use the following for communication and outreach to the public?						
Blogs						
Yes	19	20	19	12	11	21
No	33	33	26	50	46	27
Don't know	48	45	55	39	43	51
Refused/No answer	1	2	-	-	-	1

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E-mail						
Yes	69	72	81	79	67	65
No	12	15	3	15	19	9
Don't know	19	14	16	6	14	26
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
Facebook						
Yes	37	32	44	31	28	41
No	20	22	16	33	28	15
Don't know	42	44	41	37	44	41
Refused/No answer	2	2	-	-	-	3
An official website						
Yes	79	73	84	67	77	84
No	8	10	3	23	17	2
Don't know	14	17	13	10	6	14
Refused/No answer	*	-	-	-	-	*
Online interactive public forums						
Yes	17	15	7	10	17	20
No	31	37	26	46	42	23
Don't know	52	48	68	44	42	55
Refused/No answer	1	-	-	-	-	1
Twitter						
Yes	16	10	10	4	17	22
No	25	27	23	46	31	18
Don't know	59	63	68	50	53	59
Refused/No answer	1	-	-	-	-	1
And how about some other type of media?						
Yes	24	27	23	14	28	23
No	6	2	6	23	8	5
Don't know	39	34	36	34	22	46
Refused/No answer	34	43	41	25	42	29

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

	Total N=462 %	Bay Area n=125 %	Central Coast n=50 %	Nonurban Northern California n=68 %	San Joaquin Valley/ Central & Southern Sierra n=50 %	Southern California n=169 %
Q1. What is your job title?						
CEO	17	13	22	10	20	20
CFO	3	5	4	3	2	2
Director	6	8	6	6	4	7
Executive Director	41	48	42	37	40	37
President	18	14	18	22	16	21
Program Director	3	2	4	4	4	2
Religious Leader	3	3	-	1	2	4
Vice President	2	-	4	-	2	2
Treasurer	3	2	4	3	4	3
Founder/Cofounder	2	2	4	1	-	3
Chairman/ Chairman of the Board	2	2	2	7	2	1
Board member	1	1	-	-	2	2
Something else	4	2	2	7	4	5
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
Q2. Would you say the following are a major goal, a minor goal, or not a goal of your organization?						
To encourage public participation in local government decision making						
A major goal	29	28	20	22	32	34
A minor goal	38	43	48	44	40	29
Not a goal	32	29	32	34	28	36
Don't know	*	-	-	-	-	1
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
To inform or work with local public officials on issues of concern to your membership or community						
A major goal	57	59	50	54	58	59
A minor goal	37	37	48	37	38	34
Not a goal	5	4	2	9	4	7
Don't know	*	-	-	-	-	1
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-

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To actively organize and engage the public on issues that affect their lives and/or communities						
A major goal	62	65	60	59	62	61
A minor goal	32	30	30	35	36	33
Not a goal	6	6	10	6	2	6
Don't know	-	-	-	-	-	-
Refused/No answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
Q3. Which of these best describes the people your organization MAINLY serves?						
General public— no specific subgroup	26	20	28	24	24	30
A religious congregation	6	9	2	3	6	7
Ethnic/Racial minorities	19	26	10	9	30	17
Individuals with physical or mental health concerns	17	19	18	10	6	21
Immigrant communities	10	18	4	4	12	7
Low-income families or individuals	34	42	34	25	32	31
Residents of a particular community, city, county, region or unincorporated area	23	32	26	26	36	11
Something else	8	10	4	10	12	7
Don't know	-	-	-	-	-	-
Refused/No answer	*	-	-	-	-	1
Q25. Approximately how old is your organization?						
Less than one year	-	-	-	-	-	-
1–4 years	8	6	4	4	16	9
5–9 years	16	10	10	22	14	21
10–19 years	22	26	36	19	14	18
20 years or more	54	58	50	54	56	51
Don't know	-	-	-	-	-	-
Refused/No answer	*	1	-	-	-	1

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Q26. Approximately how many people does your organization currently employ?						
Less than 5	48	47	52	47	56	47
5-10	17	17	12	19	12	19
11-20	13	14	18	15	8	12
21-50	8	8	8	9	4	9
51-99	5	6	4	1	10	5
100 or more	7	7	6	7	10	7
Don't know	1	2	-	1	-	1
Refused/No answer	*	-	-	-	-	1
Q27. Where does your organization get MOST of its funding from?						
Local government	14	17	16	13	8	14
State government	13	11	12	24	6	13
Federal government	13	9	18	16	10	13
Private foundations	28	31	40	18	26	27
Membership/Dues	16	17	10	16	12	17
Donations	52	51	48	53	44	56
Earned revenue	11	13	14	4	18	9
Fund-raisers	5	3	2	7	4	5
Grants	2	2	4	-	6	1
Founder(s)	1	-	-	-	2	1
Endowments	1	1	4	-	-	-
Something else	2	1	-	3	-	4
Don't know	-	-	-	-	-	-
Refused/No answer	*	-	-	-	-	1
Q28. Policy decisions from which level of government have the MOST influence on your organization and its mission?						
Local	50	61	54	38	52	46
State	47	42	56	51	38	50
Federal	40	35	50	34	40	43
Don't know	6	6	4	7	2	7
Refused/No answer	1	-	-	-	4	1

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Q29. Would you say the community you work in is mostly rural, mostly suburban, mostly urban, or a mix?						
Mostly rural	16	5	20	44	42	5
Mostly suburban	21	26	18	12	14	23
Mostly urban	38	48	14	19	16	51
Both rural and urban	5	3	12	4	14	2
Both urban and suburban	4	4	4	4	-	5
Both suburban and rural	4	2	10	9	2	2
All three	7	5	12	6	10	6
A mix	5	6	8	1	2	4
Don't know	-	-	-	-	-	-
Refused/No answer	1	-	2	-	-	1
Q30. Are you of Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino descent, or not?						
Yes	9	5	8	3	28	11
No	91	95	90	97	72	88
Don't know	-	-	-	-	-	-
Refused/No answer	-	-	2	-	-	1
Q31. What is your race?						
White	76	75	86	85	68	72
Asian	6	9	2	4	2	7
Black or African-American	9	10	2	4	6	12
American Indian or Alaskan Native	3	2	2	-	4	4
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	2	1	4	-	4	2
Hispanic/Latino	4	2	6	1	12	4
Mixed	1	1	2	1	2	1
Something else	2	2	2	1	2	1
Don't know	*	-	-	-	2	1
Refused/No answer	2	2	2	1	4	3
Q32. Gender						
Male	45	40	42	40	62	47
Female	55	59	58	60	38	53
Refused/No answer	*	1	-	-	-	1

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors of “Beyond Business as Usual” would like to thank the following people for their support and contributions to the preparation of this report:

The many California civic leaders and local officials who took the time to share their views and experiences by responding to our surveys, and those we personally consulted, whose insights have informed this project throughout its development;

Our funders and partners at The James Irvine Foundation, especially Amy Dominguez-Arms, for offering us the opportunity to conduct this research and the freedom to explore the issues without constraint or bias;

Our partners Terry Amsler, at the Institute for Local Government, and Pete Peterson, at The Davenport Institute for Public Engagement and Civic Leadership at Pepperdine University, for their indispensable input, advice and assistance throughout this research;

Ann Duffet and Steve Farkas, of the FDR group, for their expert assistance and advice, especially in the early stages of this research;

Social Science Research Solutions, who brought invaluable expertise to their fielding of the surveys;

Allison Rizzolo, Megan Donovan and Michael Rojas—Public Agenda’s communications team—for bringing our work to the attention of a broad audience;

And Will Friedman, president of Public Agenda, for his vision, insight and guidance throughout this project.

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