Insights and Considerations Learned from Workshop Participants

Understanding Hesitancies of Communities

A selection of observations from co-design workshops

2024

Workshop Description

We asked participants about the **hesitancies towards urban and community forestry initiatives** that are important to understand about the community they serve and/or are a part of. The identified hesitances can inform urban forestry initiatives in their planning and execution.

> **Hesitancies:** These hesitancies were identified through all five sets of workshops. More specific hesitancies from specific communities are identified, as well. While these insights can provide guidance concerning engaging with specific communities, we recognize the limitation that a set of workshops is only a small component of best practices in community engagement.

Insights and Considerations

General

- **Resource Challenges**
    - **Funding Concerns:** Lack of financial resources raises questions about sustainability and longevity.
    - **Time Constraints:** Limited time and financial priorities create challenges in dedicating efforts to green initiatives.
- **Access and Safety**
    - **Unwelcoming Spaces:** Fear of being unwelcome due to language barriers, geographic location, and concerns about crime.
    - **Safety and Legal Hesitancy:** Concerns about personal safety, legal consequences, and hesitancy in accessing official spaces.
- **Government Distrust**
    - **Generational Trauma:** Historical betrayal and skepticism towards official government efforts.
    - **Fear of Official Efforts:** Doubts about the authenticity and success of initiatives led by government officials.
- **Educational Gaps**
    - **Lack of Knowledge:** Limited understanding of environmental factors like air quality and heat index.

- o **Educational Deficiency:** Insufficient education about composting, planting, and available resources, leading to distrust in city systems.
- **Cultural Barriers**
  - o **Language and Cultural Differences:** Language barriers and challenges related to cultural practices, transportation, and system engagement.
  - o **Miscommunication and Knowledge Gap:** Pervasive miscommunication and a lack of knowledge affecting community attitudes toward urban forestry.

- **Community Engagement and Buy-In**
  - o **Limited Community Involvement:** Historical disappointments, skepticism, and lack of buy-in from communities.
  - o **Vulnerability Concerns:** Resistance to engagement due to potential failure and vulnerability in supporting new initiatives.
- **Resource Allocation and Affordability**
  - o **Volunteer Burnout:** Burnout from managing burdens without adequate assistance and funding.
  - o **Affordability and Money Concerns:** Affordability challenges for basic needs, inflation, and uncertainties about the sustainability of green space programs.

Indigenous Participant Insights

- **Time**
  - o **Prioritization Challenges:** Community members face numerous stressors and financial difficulties in daily life, making it challenging to prioritize initiatives that involve giving back to the environment.
  - o **Limited Time:** Like many underserved communities, time constraints make it difficult to engage in activities not directly linked to immediate personal and family needs.
- **Government Fears**
  - o **Generational Trauma:** Historical betrayal and generational trauma from past interactions with government officials, particularly the U.S. government, lead to skepticism about official efforts.
  - o **Skepticism:** A long history of being burned by the government fosters a general mistrust of official initiatives.
- **Lack of Resources**
  - o **Economic Concerns:** Plants are viewed as potentially occupying space where financial opportunities could arise, leading to resistance based on economic considerations.
- **Resistance to Engagement**
  - o **Self-Isolation:** Some tribes and segments of communities choose to self-isolate, posing a challenge in reaching and engaging with these groups.
  - o **Vulnerability Concerns:** There are real risks and vulnerabilities for tribal individuals attempting to connect externally and support new initiatives, especially if they face failure.

African American Participant Insights

- **Resources/Maintenance/Upkeep**
  - **Financial Concerns:** Community members question the funding source for initiatives, especially when households are prioritizing basic needs.
  - **Longevity Concerns:** There is skepticism about the sustainability and lasting impact of these initiatives.
- **Safety & Financial Responsibility**
  - **Infrastructure Impact** Concerns about potential damage, such as pipes being ruined, if trees are planted too close to homes, with a reluctance to assume financial responsibility for resulting issues.
- **Time**
  - **Time Constraints:** Many community members lack the time to participate in the planning process for new green spaces or to spend time in them. Compensation for planning time and consideration of proximity to communities are deemed essential for regular use.
- **Displacement**
  - **Gentrification Worries:** Some fear that increased green space development could worsen existing gentrification pressures.
  - **Uncertainty about New Projects:** Concerns about the nature of "new projects" and their implications for the community, accompanied by a general distrust of government involvement and a desire for inclusion in decision-making processes.
- **Skepticism**
  - **Historical Letdowns:** Past experiences of flawed processes and bad faith engagement have left the Black community skeptical about the success and sincerity of new efforts.
- **Lack of Information**
  - **Communication Challenges:** Hesitancy arises from information being perceived as either too advanced, filled with jargon, or overly simplified, reflecting concerns about racist assumptions regarding community comprehension levels.

Latine Participant Insights

- **Language Barriers:**
  - **Communication Challenges:** Difficulty in understanding initiatives and participating due to language barriers.
- **Lack of Funding:**
  - **Financial Constraints:** Limited resources and funding pose challenges for implementing and sustaining green space initiatives.
- **Unavailable Safe Green Space Options:**
  - **Safety Concerns:** Limited availability of safe green spaces, with concerns about crime and potential dangers, impacting community members' willingness to engage.
- **Fear of Government (Undocumented Immigrants):**

spreading roots

3

- o **Legal Concerns:** Undocumented immigrants fear legal consequences and repercussions when engaging with government-related initiatives, affecting their willingness to participate.
- **Access:**
  - o **Feeling Unwelcome:** There is a great fear of being unwelcome in spaces due to various reasons, including a lack of Spanish-language signs, geographic location, and concerns about gentrification.
- **Time:**
  - o **Time Constraints:** Time limitations can hinder participation in processes, and a lack of motivation may result from past negative experiences.

Selected Resources

These resources provide examples of organizations incorporating community engaged planning into their work, how-to's focused on assessing community needs through thoughtful engagement and recognition of hesitancies, and a case study that can provide an example of successfully overcoming these hesitancies.

EXAMPLE - Arbor Day Foundation's "A Tree Can Be an Equalizer": The Arbor Day Foundation works to support tree planting across the county to address climate change. In this guide, they consider a community's needs, expertise, and desires as a part of a more holistic urban forestry strategy.

HOW-TO - University of Kansas' Community Tool Box: As a part of a broad set of community building resources, this tool kit focus on conducting a concern survey – which can help inform a community organization or locality about the major concerns a set of individuals could have regarding an urban forestry initiative.

CASE STUDY - Tree Planting in Detroit: This case study provides important lessons for community organizations – an organization in Detroit faced pushback from residents who opposed tree planting in their neighborhood. The organization had not engaged with the community properly to fully gauge hesitancies surrounding tree management, lack of decision-making regarding the type of tree, and lack of recognition of time needed to maintain a new tree canopy.

References

A tree can be an equalizer | Stories at Arborday.org.(n.d.).https://www.arborday.org/stories/atrecanbe-an-equalizer.cfm

Chapter 3. Assessing Community needs and resources | Section 10. Conducting concerns Surveys | Main

section | Community Tool Box. (n.d.). https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-ofcontents/assessment/assessingcommunity-needs-and-resources/conduct-concerns-surveys/main

Carmichael, C., & McDonough, M. H. (2019b). Community Stories: Explaining resistance to street Tree

Planting programs in Detroit, Michigan, USA. *Society & Natural Resources*, *32*(5), 588–605. https://doi.org/10.1080/08941920.2018.1550229