“Not Just Dragons”: A model for inclusive engagement with communities of colour

Miranda Eng, Senior Consultant, Context: An Argyle Company
July 2019 Webinar - IAP2 North American Conference 2018 Encore presentation
Overview

1. **Introduction:** who we are
2. **Project:** what we did
3. **Model:** what we heard
4. **Lessons:** what we can do
5. **Discussion:** let’s discuss
Hi, I’m Miranda.

I am a Senior Consultant at Context: An Argyle Company, one of the largest independent communication and engagement firms in Canada.

I am a Co-chair and board member of the hua foundation, a non-profit organization in Vancouver’s Chinatown working to advance civic decision-making, engagement and representation through an inclusive, anti-racism lens.
Who we are.

Context: An Argyle Company (Context) is a full-service strategic consulting firm in Canada with over 30 years of experience drawing people into conversations about their communities and lives.

We set a place for them to sit at the table when important decisions are being made.
Who we are.

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“We must ask ourselves:

- **Who are we not often hearing from?**
- **Who is at the table?**
- **Who is not at the table?**
- **Is the table in the right place?**

- from hua foundation and focus group participant
POLL: What about you?

QUESTION 1
Where do you live?
a) Canada  
b) United States  
c) Australia and NZ  
d) Other

QUESTION 2
Do you identify as a person of colour?
a) Yes  
b) No  
c) Prefer not to say

QUESTION 3
What do you want out of this presentation?
a) I want to better understand some of the experiences cultural communities face  
b) I want to be more culturally competent  
c) I want to learn practical tactics to apply for inclusive engagement  
d) I want to feel seen and supported  
e) All of the above  
f) Other
“For so long we were excluded from mattering. Makes it hard to be part of the process unless you insist.”

- from Chinatown member and focus group participant
How might we make public participation more inclusive?
Focus group program
Part I
Introduction: Getting to know one another
• Who is Context, what do we do and who is our team?
• What are our intentions?

Plenary: Defining inclusive
• Why does inclusion matter to you and your community?
• What makes you feel included and invited?
• What makes you feel excluded?

Part II
Break-out: Discussing promising practices
In looking at industry practices for inclusive engagement:
• What works? What doesn’t work?
• What is missing? How could these practices be used?
What we heard.

Our model:
Five Pillars
Guiding Strategies
Grounding Principles
Limitations
Grounding principles

**POWER**
Recognize our worldview can inadvertently exclude communities from public processes.

**CULTURAL SAFETY**
Learning and understanding how a community’s history can make members feel disrespected and unsafe in a public process.

**INVESTMENT**
Allocate more time and resources to earn community trust and build understanding of the project to avoid a transactional, in-and-out public process.
Limitations and considerations

- In process
- In representation
- In language
- In completeness
- In prioritization
- In use across communities
As the engagement team, what are we aiming for when designing the process?

If we achieved our goal, how would this look and feel for community members?

To help us achieve our goal and outcome, what are some guiding strategies, tactics and considerations for designing the process?
**EQUITY**

**GOAL**
To design an engagement process that reaches and amplifies marginalized voices

**OUTCOME**
Community members feel that they are being heard and treated fairly

**GUIDING STRATEGIES**
Design a process to balance power dynamics.

Ensure that you hear from those who aren’t often heard.

Give greater weight to input heard from those more marginalized.

“You might think you may be hearing or interpreting answers, but it may mean something different. Your power may influence/limit what you hear and understand. Recognize that there’s another worldview that you have to understand, and recognize that it is equal to yours.”
"Participants are likely to be intent on ensuring the preservation of their community particularly if it has a history of adversity and proposals attempting to chip away at the cultural identity and the long-term viability of the community."
“Racial licensing is dangerous, such as ‘this person of colour says it’s fine’”

“One of the biggest problems with the engagement process is building capacity within the community”.
Money on the wrong things, i.e. refreshments instead of giving staff a translator that would be more meaningful for equitable access

To eliminate the barriers to participation and offer different ways to seek and hear input

Invest in accessibility.

Minimize the burden to participate.

Use simple and appropriate ways to gather input.

ACCESSIBILITY

GOAL

To eliminate the barriers to participation and offer different ways to seek and hear input

Community members feel informed and enabled to participate in the engagement process

OUTCOME

GUIDING STRATEGIES
“Important to see someone leading the process who is representative or who comes from the community, who already has an affiliation with Chinatown or proven already within the community”
## Our model for inclusive public participation

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<td>CULTURAL RESPECT</td>
<td>To honour and respect the community’s cultural values, history and diversity</td>
<td>Community members feel respected, included and understood</td>
<td>Learn about the community’s history of exclusion. Learn about the community. Recognize the complexity.</td>
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<td>COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT</td>
<td>To provide the community with a meaningful way to shape the process and outcome</td>
<td>Community members feel that their input is valued, helping to shape the outcome of the process</td>
<td>Seek diverse community input. Build community capacity to engage.</td>
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<td>TRUST + ACCOUNTABILITY</td>
<td>To demonstrate transparency, legitimacy and credibility</td>
<td>Community members feel that the engagement team is authentic and that the process is accountable</td>
<td>Invest time to build relationship with community members. Invest time to earn trust with community members. Be open and authentic.</td>
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For the full model and project report, go to contextresearch.ca
Community feedback

Grounding principles are very helpful. Particularly the examination of power, of the call for cultural safety, and acknowledging the model’s own limitations. All of this helps build a foundation for engaging with humility.

Positive starting point for a new model of engagement.

This model looks very promising and I am super excited about seeing it tested in the real world.

I think this will really push boundaries and can create growth in productive ways. May need to identify resources that can support engagement professionals in learning more and putting these principles into practice, so it’s not too daunting?

I really like the idea of having questions as guiding tactics.

This is a model which may be tested in other communities with some input/adjustments for suitability.
What we can do.

To provide the community with a meaningful way to shape the process and outcome

Community members feel that their input is valued, helping to shape the outcome of the process

SEEK DIVERSE COMMUNITY INPUT:
- Do your liaisons/advisors truly represent community values and experience? Might they have ulterior motives?
- Are you gathering input from lived community experiences along with formal and organizational expertise?
- Is your process tokenizing or using racial licensing to have one member speak on behalf of the community?

BUILD COMMUNITY CAPACITY TO ENGAGE:
- How will you take time to explain the project, the tradeoffs, and the engagement process in an unbiased way?
- How will you involve the community to help shape the engagement objectives and who should be heard?
- How will you fill knowledge gaps so everyone can understand and contribute?
- Can you help create guidelines and conflict resolution tools to support the community to work together?

GUIDING TACTIC
- Support replacing universal metrics with a specific evaluation outcome, but there are preferences. A specific outcome is not always the best.
## Reflecting on our resourcing priorities

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We can make P2 more inclusive when we recognize and balance the power we have as engagement professionals.
We can make P2 more inclusive when we learn about the community’s history, and use this understanding to engage with cultural respect.
We can make P2 more inclusive when we take the time to build relationship, earn trust, and be accountable to communities.
We can make P2 more inclusive when we advocate for dedicated resources and programs to reach those who aren’t often heard.
We can make P2 more inclusive when our industry is more representative of the lived experiences and cultural identities of the communities we engage.
With power comes responsibility. It’s on us to make public participation more inclusive and equitable.
Thank you for your time.

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