

Engaging Communities in Decision Making

Bringing the community into the decision making process is essential for a robust democracy to succeed. When constituents are able to discuss issues at length with their representatives, it allows elected officials to understand the concerns of their districts in ways that are not achieved by polls and questionnaires alone. It is essential to both representatives and constituents

Cost is ranked low (\$), medium (\$\$), and high (\$\$\$). Each may vary depending upon method of implementation and constituency size. Benefits are ranked low (★), medium (★★), and high (★★★).

Resource Type	Description	Cost	Official's Benefit	Constituents' Benefit
Town Hall Meetings	Large-scale meetings, with the entire community invited to exchange ideas and concerns	\$	★★	★★
Office Hours	Intimate, one-on-one conversations with constituents to gain knowledge of their concerns	\$\$\$	★★★	★★★
Community Events	Large-scale events, such as barbecues, fairs, etc., where representatives can converse with their constituents while spending time with the whole community	\$\$\$	★★	★★
Speaking Opportunities	Occasions for representatives to address large groups of their constituents and field some questions	\$	★★	★★
Panel Discussions	Occasions for representatives to address groups of their constituents with other established member of the community	\$	★	★
Focus Groups	Small groups of constituents gathered to answer focused questions of specific issues and explain their responses in-depth	\$\$	★★★	★★

Resource Type	Description	Cost	Official's Benefit	Constituents' Benefit
Blog	A continuous, online conversation allowing constituents to express their opinions and concerns, and get responses from representatives and staffers	\$	★★	★★
Radio Call-in Shows	Making radio appearances and allowing constituents to call in (later made available online as podcasts)	\$	★★	★★
Questionnaires	Online (or by mail); Allows constituents to rank priorities and rate effectiveness	\$	★★★	★★★★
Office contact information	Email, phone, fax, and address make available for constituents to contact representatives	\$	★★	★★★★
Website Polls	Collects quick tallys of constituent priorities	\$	★★★★	★★★★
Text message polling	Gathers a quick tally of constituent priorities of single issues	\$	★★	★★