

# WHAT IS THE PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE INDEX?

The purpose of this guide is to allow government officials to deepen their understanding of the system of engagement in which they work by using the **Participatory Governance Index**, or PGI. The PGI is a rubric, an assessment tool made up of categories and criteria designed to help you understand the many component parts of a healthy government engagement system. This rubric is designed to be used by individuals or small groups to support the exploration of key concepts and their relationships to the daily work of engagement in government contexts.

You can use this tool to better understand your system's successes and challenges within each engagement category or across categories, to plan or prioritize your own development, or as an opportunity to bring people together for conversation around shared values.

The PGI rubric has four categories: **engagement structures**, **engagement opportunities**, **commitments to engagement**, and **community building**. Equity, transparency and communication are core components of an effective system of engagement and you will see those features listed as exemplary qualities in each of the four categories. This guide introduces you to these categories and the ways that they are evaluated with this rubric. It suggests a process of use from convening a group through prioritizing strategic improvement based on your PGI self-assessment. It includes a series of reflection questions aimed at fostering a deep and detailed conversation about the system of engagement in your community.

We built this rubric based on the results of a yearlong international research project called Healthier Democracies that looked at innovative and successful government-led participatory governance projects around the world. In other parts of the [Healthier Democracies Project](#), you will find case studies and analysis that show the PGI concepts in action. The city- and state-level profiles illustrate the ways that governments of all kinds are working to develop and strengthen their own participatory governance systems.

The PGI facilitates exploration of two questions for public officials:

- What are the components of an effective government-led system of engagement?
- How can we work on the next steps for growing engagement within our area of interest or influence?

*The PGI can be used by individuals, small groups or whole organizations to measure their system(s) of engagement as part of a one-time evaluation or an ongoing assessment.*

*Self-assessment with the PGI shows opportunities for development and growth within a larger ecosystem of engagement.*

## What Is a System of Engagement?

Research in the Healthier Democracies Project provided a rich body of evidence to support what many of us probably already know: successful engagement work does not happen in isolation. Rather, effective public engagement emerges through a network of structures, policies, plans and commitments built and sustained by a wide range of stakeholders.

A system of engagement depends on these structures, opportunities, networks and stakeholders. An effective system of government engagement includes evidence of strong and sustained commitments to engagement structures, values, opportunities and communities. The result of a healthy system of engagement is a concept that we're calling participatory governance. While it can take many forms, participatory governance is the collaboration of official systems and structures with public input and feedback, resulting in more effective policy making, greater trust between government and residents and healthier democracies.

The PGI uses these four categories to illuminate the components of a system of engagement:



**Engagement structures:** patterned or organized opportunities for engagement that support cross-sector and government-community collaborations



**Commitment to engagement:** investment in engagement as a core value that guides efforts to promote participation



**Opportunities for engagement:** participation that is normalized and embedded into decision-making and that guides citizen-centered governance strategies



**Community building:** engagement processes that foster meaningful connections between and within communities

These categories are presented in the PGI as independent variables for the ease of scoring. However, we realize that there is overlap between these concepts. As you work through the PGI, make note of the places where you find connections that show continuity of success or persistent challenges across categories in your work.

## How to Read the PGI

**Category:** The PGI has four categories: Structures for Engagement, Commitments to Engagement, Opportunities for Engagement, and Community Building. Category names and definitions are indicated in the left column of the PGI.

**Criteria:** Each category is made up of a range of criteria. The example below, Community Building, has two criteria for your consideration: 1) empowerment and community connections, and 2) hubs and infrastructure. A definition can be found under each criteria category.

**Guidelines:** The guidelines provide a range of descriptions of what the criteria may look like in action in your community. The guidelines are structured to help you think about where specific strengths and opportunities for growth exist in each category.

**Assessment:** Each guideline is matched with a corresponding assessment, seen in the final column. For example, if your community's work in "empowerment and community connections" most aligns with the middle guideline, your assessment in that category would be "established."

We chose the assessment categories of "emergent," "established," and "exemplary" as a way of acknowledging the developmental process of building a healthier democracy. Though all assessments are inherently evaluative, this range is designed to show users of the PGI the value inherent in each of these categories, as well as to point to a way forward in their work to improve their participatory governance.

**Equity, Transparency, and Communication:** As you work through the categories of the PGI, you might notice some common themes, such as equity, transparency and communication. These similarities are intentional. Research in the Healthier Democracies Project showed them to be key features of successful participatory governance in every category. We have embedded them in the tool to illustrate the ways these ideas function in different parts of the system of engagement and encourage you to think about specific challenges or successes you've faced with equity, transparency, and communication as you work through your own self-assessment.

## How to Use the PGI with Your Team

### CONVENE

Bring together a group of people who are interested in learning more about participatory governance in your local, regional or state system. If you plan to work through the whole PGI, we suggest you set aside 2 hours for the self-assessment process. You may also choose to divide the work between teams, with smaller groups meeting to discuss each category before bringing the findings together for a cumulative reflection.

### READ

Orient yourselves to the PGI's key concepts (systems of engagement and participatory governance) and the 4 categories that the tool uses to measure those concepts (Engagement Structures, Commitment to Engagement, Opportunities for Engagement, and Community Building).

The Healthier Democracies Project's Lessons Learned document is organized according to the categories of the PGI and shows the evidence used to build the assessment. It links these categories to specific examples in our 15 case studies of local, regional and state-level government-led participatory engagement efforts around the world and can orient you to these concepts in action.

### REFLECT

Work through the categories of the PGI together. Consider the content in relation to your own work and the work of your government. Use the reflection questions to guide your conversation and inquiry.

Take notes. Though the PGI itself will only yield category scores, the rich conversation and discussion that will result from your reflection process will contain essential information for communicating your results to others and building a plan for what's next after you're done with scoring.

### EVALUATE

Look at your self-assessment scores. How healthy is your system of engagement? What do you think about your ranking? How do you feel about the results? What surprised you most? What most excited you?

The purpose of scoring a rubric is to identify successes and challenges in your system of engagement. At Healthier Democracies, we think of this as a formative assessment – a tool designed to highlight areas for celebration (your “exemplary” categories), as well as to illuminate opportunities for growth and improvement (your “emergent” or “established” categories). Formative assessments should inform future practice.

Start with the group who scored the PGI. What can and will you do now that you know what you know?

### CONNECT & CONTINUE

Once you've scored your PGI and established your team's next priorities, it's time to bring the information to other stakeholders. Identify a group of people who you think would benefit from learning more about what you've found, or who might have more or different information to contribute to the self-assessment or the prioritization of its results.

Together, make a plan. What action steps, small or large, emerged from the PGI scoring process that require a larger group or a more coordinated effort? What changes can you make immediately to improve your participatory governance? What longer-term goals do you want to prioritize, and what is the first step in moving toward those goals?

### CLOSING

Thank you for your investment in evaluating and improving participatory governance. As you work toward building a healthier democracy in your community, we encourage you to be in touch. The Healthier Democracies Project and Public Agenda are interested in learning more about your experience with the PGI, as well as the work that emerges from this self-reflection. Please contact us [in this way].

CATEGORY	CRITERIA	GUIDELINES	ASSESSMENT	
 <p><b>STRUCTURES FOR ENGAGEMENT</b></p> <p><i>Patterned or organized opportunities for engagement that support cross-sector and institution-community collaboration</i></p>	<p><b>Government Infrastructure for Collaboration</b></p> <p><i>Instances and channels for effective and inclusive participation</i></p>	<p>There are many structures (e.g., councils, committees and/or digital platforms) that allow government and citizens to collaboratively shape decisions, process information and listen to each other.</p> <hr/> <p>There are some structures (e.g., councils, committees and/or digital platforms) that allow government and citizens to collaboratively shape decisions, process information and listen to each other. They do not always operate as intended.</p> <hr/> <p>There are few structures (e.g., councils, committees and/or digital platforms) that allow government and citizens to collaboratively shape decisions, process information and listen to each other. These structures might be limited in their ability to create authentic, meaningful opportunities for engagement.</p>	<p><i>Exemplary</i></p> <hr/> <p><i>Established</i></p> <hr/> <p><i>Emergent</i></p>	
	<p><b>Cross-Sector Collaboration</b></p> <p><i>Government encourages multiple sectors and agents to collaborate and represent the demographic and cross-sectoral diversity of the city or region</i></p>	<p>Government provides meaningful opportunities for interaction and collaboration across differences, including across sectors (e.g., different agencies and departments); across communities, civil society and government; and among a diversity of groups (e.g., race, age, gender, cultural background, politics, etc.).</p> <hr/> <p>Government provides some opportunities for interaction and collaboration across differences, including across sectors (e.g., different agencies and departments); across communities, civil society and government; or among a diversity of groups (e.g., race, age, gender, cultural background, politics, etc.).</p> <hr/> <p>Government provides few opportunities for interaction and collaboration across differences, including across sectors (e.g., different agencies and departments); across communities, civil society and government; or among a diversity of groups (e.g., race, age, gender, cultural background, politics, etc.). These opportunities tend to attract like-minded groups or the same people time and again.</p>	<p><i>Exemplary</i></p> <hr/> <p><i>Established</i></p> <hr/> <p><i>Emergent</i></p>	
	<p><b>Online and Technology-Based Participation</b></p> <p><i>Deployment of ICTs to engage citizens or amplify existing channels with capacity for shared decision-making and/or policy impact</i></p>	<p>Government provides a range of technological options (e.g., website, apps, videos, etc.) to facilitate the public’s participation in making decisions. Tech-based participation can also impact a variety of decision-making processes and stages (e.g., agenda setting, design, decision-making, implementation, evaluation, etc.).</p> <hr/> <p>Government provides some technological options (e.g., website, apps, videos, etc.) to facilitate the public’s participation in making decisions. Tech-based participation can be limited to only some aspects of decision-making processes (e.g., agenda setting, design, decision-making, implementation, evaluation, etc.).</p> <hr/> <p>Government occasionally provides technological options (e.g., website, apps, videos, etc.) to facilitate the public’s participation in making decisions. Tech-based participation may be a one-time opportunity rather than continuous over time.</p>	<p><i>Exemplary</i></p> <hr/> <p><i>Established</i></p> <hr/> <p><i>Emergent</i></p>	
	<p><b>Accessibility of Technologies</b></p>	<p><i>See next page</i></p>		

CATEGORY	CRITERIA	GUIDELINES	ASSESSMENT
 <p><b>STRUCTURES FOR ENGAGEMENT</b> Continued</p>	<p><b>Accessibility of Technologies</b></p> <p><i>Designed to reach different audiences and/or to lower barriers to participation, including support for users</i></p>	<p>Technologies, channels and/or engagement strategies are designed to reach diverse groups, with special attention paid to underrepresented communities and to the digital divide.</p>	<i>Exemplary</i>
		<p>Technologies, channels and/or engagement strategies partially cater to underrepresented groups and communities, and/or to the digital divide.</p>	<i>Established</i>
		<p>Technologies, channels and/or engagement strategies are designed without any special targeting of underrepresented groups or accommodations for the digital divide.</p>	<i>Emergent</i>
 <p><b>OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT</b></p> <p><i>Participation is a normalized and embedded form of public decision-making, guiding a citizen-centered governance strategy</i></p>	<p><b>Capacity for Impact</b></p> <p><i>Meaningful opportunities for participation are driven by issues identified as important by the public, that can have identifiable outcomes and produce policy change</i></p>	<p>Government is receptive to collaboratively identifying and framing issues with the public, creating opportunities for engagement where the results can have a clear impact on policy, and participants have the possibility to follow up on compliance.</p>	<i>Exemplary</i>
		<p>Government identifies the issues and then shares them with the public for feedback, creating some opportunities for engagement where the results can have a clear impact on policy, and participants have the possibility to at least partially follow up on compliance.</p>	<i>Established</i>
		<p>Government identifies issues and sets the agenda of what the public can engage about. The government allows citizens to inform the government of their preferences, and there's a possibility for impact on policy but not a clear path forward of how public participation would affect policy. Participants might not have the possibility to follow up on compliance.</p>	<i>Emergent</i>
	<p><b>Frequency and Variety</b></p> <p><i>Forms of participation are diverse, including e.g. online and offline, hybrid formats, single and permanent bodies and opportunities for engagement, and government is responsive at different stages in different processes</i></p>	<p>Government offers a wide range of channels for engagement that take place in different formats. Some might be permanent while others might be designed as single opportunities to tackle specific challenges. Multiple modes of entry ensure accessibility for different publics, and special attention is paid to grant representation and/or access to marginalized and vulnerable groups.</p>	<i>Exemplary</i>
		<p>Government offers multiple channels for engagement, some of which can take place in different formats or to tackle different issues. There might be a predominance of permanent or single/one-off processes. Some might accommodate multiple modes of entry to ensure accessibility for different publics and/or grant representation or access to marginalized and vulnerable groups.</p>	<i>Established</i>
		<p>Government centralizes engagement in a few or one single channel, which can take place in a single format or tackle single issues. They do not accommodate different publics or grant representation of specific groups, but are rather aimed at the general public.</p>	<i>Emergent</i>

CATEGORY	CRITERIA	GUIDELINES	ASSESSMENT
 <p><b>COMMITMENT TO ENGAGEMENT</b></p> <p><i>Investment in engagement as a core value that guides efforts to promote participation</i></p>	<p><b>Effective and Accessible Communication</b></p>	<p>Government communicates with the public in accessible language to inform citizens about opportunities, schedules and conditions for engagement, and the purpose of citizen participation. Special attention is paid to ensuring a broad reach among citizens, e.g. through communications in multiple languages.</p>	<i>Exemplary</i>
	<p><i>Public-facing information campaigns on the existence of channels for engagement, its importance and value</i></p>	<p>Government communicates with the public to inform citizens about opportunities, schedules and conditions for engagement; the purpose of citizen participation is implied. Communication may or may not be in multiple languages.</p>	<i>Established</i>
		<p>Government sometimes communicates with the public to inform citizens about opportunities for engagement; though not systematically and not in an accessible language(s). The purpose of citizen engagement is only somewhat clear or not directly addressed.</p>	<i>Emergent</i>
	<p><b>Formalization in Laws and Policies</b></p>	<p>Engagement is formalized in legislation, executive decrees, policies, strategic planning, or other formal documents. The legal and institutional policies or procedures for engagement have been co-created with citizens and/or civil society prior to their establishment.</p>	<i>Exemplary</i>
	<p><i>Formalization of engagement in (to some degree) legally binding regulation and embeddedness within government institutions</i></p>	<p>Engagement is formalized to some degree (e.g. public policy guidelines, policy documentation). The legal and institutional policies and procedures for engagement might have been consulted with citizens and/or civil society prior to their establishment.</p>	<i>Established</i>
		<p>Engagement is not formalized, but might be integrated in internal documents (e.g. party guidelines or program). The legal and institutional policies and procedures for engagement have not been consulted with citizens and/or civil society prior to their establishment.</p>	<i>Emergent</i>
	<p><b>Budgetary Support</b></p>	<p>Government has a dedicated and exclusive budget for engagement that has been in place over more than one government mandate.</p>	<i>Exemplary</i>
	<p><i>Budget dedicated to supporting the engagement office, staff, and programming</i></p>	<p>Government has budgetary support for engagement that has been in place over more than one year</p>	<i>Established</i>
		<p>Government has some budgetary support for engagement, but it is not embedded in the yearly budget.</p>	<i>Emergent</i>
<p><b>Staffing and Training</b></p>	<p><i>See next page</i></p>		
<p><b>Strategic Planning and Evaluation</b></p>	<p><i>See next page</i></p>		

CATEGORY	CRITERIA	GUIDELINES	ASSESSMENT
 <p><b>COMMITMENT TO ENGAGEMENT</b> Continued</p>	<p><b>Staffing and Training</b></p> <p><i>Dedicated staff and/or government department tasked with planning and implementing engagement; designed to represent and include the communities they serve; and with professionals and/or professionalization opportunities in engagement</i></p>	<p>Government has dedicated civic staff and/or a specific office or department for engagement. Public servants have training opportunities for professional development in the area of engagement, and for attention to equity.</p>	<i>Exemplary</i>
		<p>Government has dedicated civic staff for engagement. Public servants might have training opportunities for professional development in the area of engagement, and for attention to equity.</p>	<i>Established</i>
		<p>Government has civic staff in charge of engagement projects. Public servants might have other responsibilities and are not trained in engagement and/or for attention to equity.</p>	<i>Emergent</i>
	<p><b>Strategic Planning and Evaluation</b></p> <p><i>Commitment to engagement is included in short, medium and long-term goals, outputs and outcomes, and can be monitored</i></p>	<p>Government uses plans or guidelines that lead the implementation of engagement opportunities embedded within the broader institutional infrastructure, supported by an evaluation and monitoring structure. The documentation of progress in the plan is easily accessible for the public, and revised as needed.</p>	<i>Exemplary</i>
		<p>Government uses guidelines that lead the implementation of engagement opportunities, although they might not be embedded within the broader institutional infrastructure. They might include a stage of evaluation and monitoring, and the documentation might also be accessible to the public.</p>	<i>Established</i>
		<p>Government does not use predetermined guidelines to lead the implementation of engagement opportunities and/or does not evaluate and monitor them. The documentation of progress toward an engagement goal is internal and informal and not accessible to the general public.</p>	<i>Emergent</i>
 <p><b>COMMUNITY BUILDING</b> See next page</p>	<p><b>Empowerment and Community Connections</b></p>	See next page	
	<p><b>Hubs and Infrastructure</b></p>	See next page	

CATEGORY	CRITERIA	GUIDELINES	ASSESSMENT
 <p><b>COMMUNITY BUILDING</b></p> <p><i>Engagement processes foster meaningful connections in and within communities</i></p>	<p><b>Empowerment and Community Connections</b></p> <p><i>Government-led initiatives foster the civic education, engagement, and social/political organization within the community; fostering sustainable forms of local organization and autonomous problem-solving capacities</i></p>	<p>Government encourages community action beyond its departments, agencies and programs. Community organizing is fostered through local organizations and groups that represent key and/or underserved communities.</p> <hr/> <p>Government creates opportunities for community action within its departments, agencies and programs, and sometimes supports local organizations and groups that represent key and/or underserved communities.</p> <hr/> <p>Government shares information about opportunities for community action existing outside its departments, agencies and programs, but is not focused on supporting the creation or facilitation of these efforts itself. Government might not support local organizations and groups that represent key and/or underserved communities.</p>	<p><i>Exemplary</i></p> <hr/> <p><i>Established</i></p> <hr/> <p><i>Emergent</i></p>
	<p><b>Hubs and Infrastructure</b></p> <p><i>Financial means, staffing, training; physical or digital locations; and other services are provided by the government to allow communities to meet, interact and develop their own initiatives</i></p>	<p>Government funds and sustains spaces, both in person and online, for communities to meet with and without government representation present to collaborate, and experiment. Infrastructure is designed to reduce accessibility barriers and foster diverse encounters.</p> <hr/> <p>Government offers some spaces, in person and/or online, for communities to meet and collaborate (with and without government representation present). There is dedicated support at request of some groups or organizations to reduce accessibility barriers.</p> <hr/> <p>Government offers basic support for communities to meet and collaborate (with and without government representation present). Spaces, in person or online, are not designed to reduce accessibility barriers or foster diverse encounters.</p>	<p><i>Exemplary</i></p> <hr/> <p><i>Established</i></p> <hr/> <p><i>Emergent</i></p>

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# CATEGORY REFLECTION QUESTIONS



## Engagement Structures

### INFRASTRUCTURE FOR COLLABORATION

- In what ways can residents in your community directly engage with the government or public officials? What about ways that government officials can directly engage with a diverse array of participants?
- Do these structures allow for consultation? For collaboration? For work at different phases of a project or development process or policy making cycle?
- What councils, committees, digital platforms or in-person meetings are built into your ongoing engagement with residents?
- Are the engagement opportunities in your system interconnected or centrally organized?
- How do the structures in your system flex and adapt to the changing needs or different opportunities for engagement? Do you have a one-size-fits all approach, an approach that you redesign each time the demand arises or a flexible system that can be customized to meet your needs?

### CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION

- Do your government structures intersect with, or work alongside, citizen action networks, civil society or nonprofit organizations and community-based or neighborhood associations to support engagement efforts?
- Does the government host and facilitate opportunities for different organizations interested in collaboration to connect and collaborate?
- How do you engage with existing groups to ensure engagement with a wide and diverse range of participants in your community?
- How do you leverage the expertise of cross-sector organizations in your own participatory engagement processes?

### USE OF TECHNOLOGY

- What low- and high-tech options for engagement does your government support?
- Are there a range of options available for participants to use, including websites, apps, videos, hotlines, text-messaging or social media groups?
- Is technology used to replace, supplement or enhance in-person engagement opportunities or consultations?
- What measures do you take to ensure that a wide and diverse range of participants are able to use digital technologies for engagement?



## Commitment to Engagement

### CAPACITY FOR IMPACT

- Where do your engagement opportunities fall in the cycle of developing projects or policies? Are you seeking new ideas or opinions on your own ideas?
- Are constituents primarily providing feedback on government-initiated proposals or are they involved in the conceptualization and development stage?
- What decision-making power lies outside of government-led institutions or processes?
- Does your community have processes in place in which governments are committed to the implementation or funding of resident-designed initiatives?
- How are citizens involved in long-term or strategic planning in your community?
- Is there funding allocated for participatory budgeting or to support ideas that originated from your community members?

### FREQUENCY AND VARIETY

- Are there multiple opportunities for resident engagement in both short- and long-term planning or decision-making processes?
- Are some events targeted toward smaller audiences and others designed to engage bigger groups?
- Do your in-person engagement events have hybrid or online alternatives?
- What time of day or week do you provide opportunities for engagement?
- Do you design engagement opportunities explicitly to attract participants beyond “the usual suspects”?
- How are your opportunities advertised? Where can people get information on how to get involved?



## Opportunities for Engagement

### COMMUNICATION AND MESSAGING

- How does your government inform people about opportunities for engagement?
- What information do you provide them about what to expect from engagement opportunities, how their input will be used and what follow up information will be provided?
- Have you used a slogan, media campaign or mission statement that indicates the importance of public participation?
- What languages do you use for outreach and engagement?
- How do you communicate the value of engagement to the people with whom you work, overall?

### FORMALIZATION

- Where in your government does formal legislation, executive decrees, policies, strategic plans or other formal documents explicitly support participatory engagement?
- How else is engagement embedded in ongoing and sustained processes?
- What dedicated funds are available to conduct impactful participatory processes?
- Do you have an independent office, such as a Citizen Participation Office, aimed at supporting engagement opportunities?
- Are staff in your government formally trained in methods of engagement? Are there dedicated staff for engagement processes?

### STRATEGIC PLANNING AND EVALUATION

- How are citizens involved in government strategic planning processes?
- Do participants set priorities and define goals or respond and provide feedback on established goals?
- What is your evaluation process for engagement or for projects with engagement components? How do you share the findings from these assessments with your stakeholders?



## Community Building

### EMPOWERMENT

- What efforts have you made to strengthen relationships with civil society and nonprofit organizations whose work aligns with your own?
- What civic education initiatives are present in your community?
- Do you offer training or capacity building opportunities for residents and organizations in your community?
- What resources does your government have in place for residents to use to organize, plan and tackle their own challenges independently of government action?

### HUBS AND CONNECTIONS

- Do you provide administrative, technical or financial support to actors outside of the government who work to promote engagement and participation?
- What training and exchange opportunities exist between different stakeholders in your community?
- Does your government support and sustain physical or digital spaces where people can come together?
- How do you support nongovernmental forms of collective action and citizen-led deliberation?
- How do you partner with colleges and universities, corporate entities or research organizations to advance participatory practices?