



Cut to the Chase

HOW TO FIGURE OUT IF A CONSULTATION IS LEGIT & WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

Workshop Summary Report
 YIMBY Festival | September 24, 2016



1. Introduction

On September 24, 2016, Shape My City and ThinkFresh Group hosted the annual Yes In My Back Yard (YIMBY) Festival in Metro Hall. As part of the festival, six workshops were run by various community groups. Meta Strategies in collaboration with ThinkFresh Group and Swerhun Facilitation led a workshop titled “*Cut to the Chase: How to Figure out if a Consultation is Legit & What You Can Do About It!*” The workshop’s goal was to have participants share their experiences of public consultations to uncover common insights and ultimately develop strategies for improved consultation experiences in the future. The workshop was led by Liz Rykert (Meta Strategies), Howard Tam (ThinkFresh Group) and Nicole Swerhun (Swerhun Facilitation) and had around 20 participants.

2. Methodology

The workshop had participants split into groups of 4-6 people around tables and alternated between facilitated discussions, small-group discussions and discussions in pairs. Pens and sticky notes were provided to keep notes. The workshop consisted of four activities:

Activity 1: Tuning In

This section had participants break into pairs using [Impromptu Networking](#) to explore their experiences of public consultations in relation to the following questions:

- When you participate in public consultation what is your biggest challenge?
- What do you hope to get from and contribute to this workshop?

After switching pairs three times participants were asked to share highlights with group.

Activity 2: Surfacing What Works

This section had participants leading [appreciative interviews](#) with each other to learn from each other about a time when they were in a public consultation that was very effective. The pairs looked for the features that made the experience so positive and then joined another pair to share what they learned and look for common patterns. Highlights from the conversations were share with the whole group.

Activity 3: Tuning into the Experience

This section had participants in their small groups of 4-6. Each group was given a large sheet of paper and sticky notes to create an empathy map of how participants currently experience consultation (Say & Do, Think & Feel, Hear, and See) as well as their barriers to participation (Pains) and measures of success (Gains). Facilitators explained the concept of an empathy map before breaking into group discussion.

Activity 4: Tactics & Strategies

This section had participants brainstorm ideas on how to improve public consultation in a facilitated discussion. On the wall, facilitators created a chart of things to fix, based off the previous discussions, and then gathered ideas as to how to improve the process. The ideas were split into two categories: things ‘participants’ could do to get the most out of public consultation, and things ‘meeting hosts’ could do to improve the process.

3. Key Emerging Themes

Participants came to this workshop with a general sense of frustration towards consultation process. This became clear as they shared some of their past experiences during the *Surfacing What Works* segment. Some of their concerns included:

- Lack of diversity at consultations (homogeneity of participants)
- Confusion about role/location of consultation in the greater planning process
- Results of consultation unknown (how great is its impact? Does it change anything?)
- Process can feel exclusive (inaccessible language)
- Sugar-coating of process
- Process can also silence people and limit discussion

The core theme of a lot of these concerns revolved around the power that the public possesses in the consultation process. Can they influence change or is the process just tokenistic? There was a strong desire by participants to learn how to better capitalize on the power available and to create space for more. Despite their general frustration with past experiences, participants understood the value of and still wanted to engage in consultation processes as long as they could be more empowering.

4. Key Emerging Insights

Through the process of empathy mapping, during the *Tuning into the Experience* segment, participants distilled their experiences into thoughts about which elements of a consultation contributed to a positive or negative feeling based on what they would be saying & doing, thinking & feeling, hearing and seeing at a consultation session. These ideas are summarized in figure 1.

Figure 1 – Participant Experiences at a Consultation

	Positive Experiences	Negative Experiences
What Participants Say & Do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking • Completing workbooks • Sharing their message • Interaction with others and the hosts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just Sitting • Vent • Participants listening more than proponent is
What Participants are thinking and feeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notion of possibility • An immersive experience • Curious • Fun 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overwhelmed • Like a number • Too Fast • Tension • Futile • Excluded • Unwelcome/ unprepared • Lack of trust between the government and the public
What Participants Hear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other’s POV • Stories • New Ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anger • Dominant Narrative • Jargon/Acronyms • Excuses
What Participants See	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charts • Diversity • Peers • Neighbours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chairs • Lots of People • Suits • “Experts” • Bureaucrats • The “same old” people • Spaces that are not accessible • Lack of good/helpful information

Participants felt like the key barriers to being an empowered participant in consultation were the constricted time available, the overwhelming breadth of discussion, the inaccessibility of speaking publicly (and the overall extroverted-orientated nature of activities), and the perceived exclusivity of language, space and people present.

Given this discussion, participants then developed criteria for what they considered to be a successful participant experience in a consultation. A successful consultation would have participants:

- Co-creating the process
- Finding and building community
- Being treated with respect and inclusivity, and;

- Interacting with a diversity of interesting ideas.

Central to these criteria is the idea that participants want consultation to reflect and include their needs and interests in content and process.

5. Recommendations

Once the key ideas had been clarified, participants began exploring recommendations through the *Tactics & Strategies* section of the workshop. These recommendations were delineated between things participants could do and things people hosting consultations could do. Figure 2 summarizes this discussion:

Figure 2 – Recommended Actions for Participants and Meeting Hosts

Recommended Actions for Participants	Recommended Actions for Meeting Hosts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge the participants segment(s) who are absent (i.e. nobody truly represents their entire community) • Build up networks/linkages in own community • Prepare talking points ahead of time • Encourage time-consciousness in host and other participants since participants have only so many hours to give • Be conscious of your voice, and provide support to those who are more introverted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locate meetings where people already are • Utilize different methods of communication; methods that allow everyone the opportunity to speak • Stick to time • Include quieter moments before and after the session • Include relationship building opportunities

6. Conclusions

Throughout this workshop, participants dug into their experiences of frustration to parse out the key themes and ideas that facilitate a successful consultation. Of key importance was the participants’ desire to feel included and empowered. This workshop resulted in a set of recommendations that can guide the way forward for participants and hosts seeking to make the most of the consultation process. By working together, participants and hosts can build community, generate ideas and expand the horizon of what consultation can possibly achieve.

This workshop was indeed a great starting point; however, it is only the beginning. More time and conversation needs to be spent in this space so that we can more deeply explore the lived experiences of consultation participants in order to co-create improved future consultation processes.

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